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SUMMER ISSUE

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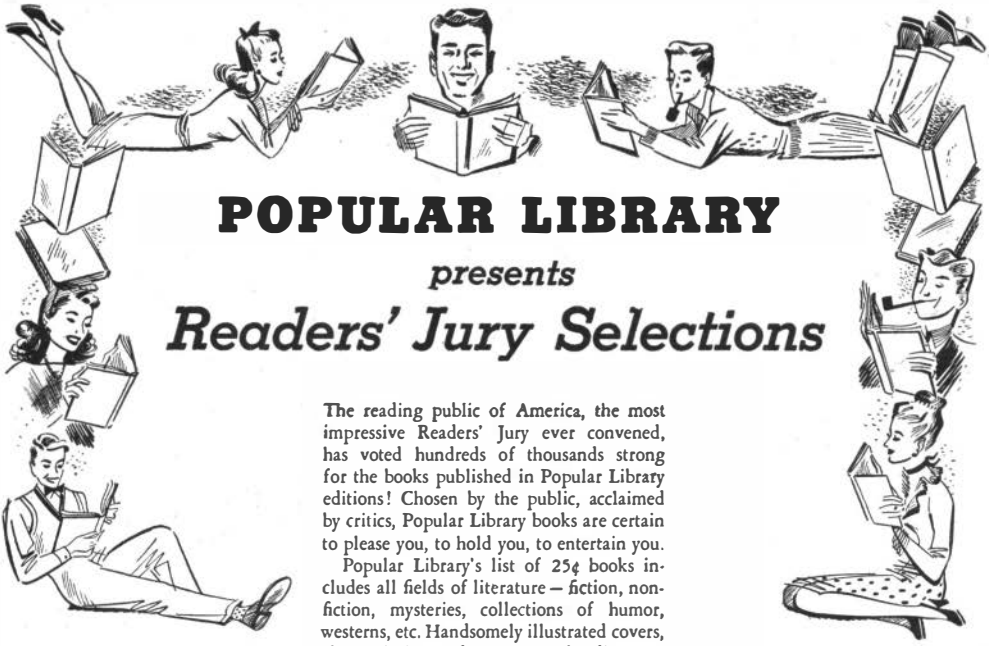

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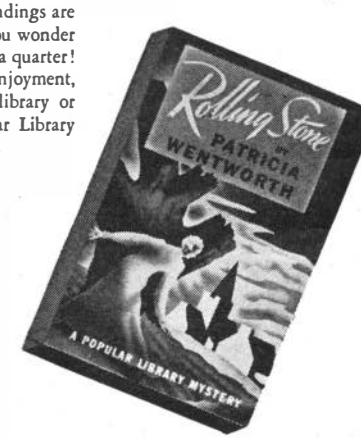

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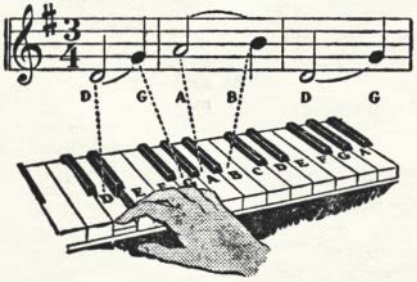

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THRILLING SPORTS

Vol. 18, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION Summer Issue

A COMPLETE BASEBALL NOVELET

PULL FOR THE FENCE

By HERBERT L. McNARY

On paper, the Romans were the best team in the league, and it took rambunctious rookie Bill Lodge, an aging receiver and a clever newspaper girl to show them up! 9

A COMPLETE WRESTLING NOVELET

SHORT STORIES

SPECIAL FEATURES

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SPORT FANS CONDUCTED BY CAP FANNING

WITH the big war almost a year behind us, that series of lesser but no less bitter conflicts known as International Sport is once more in full cry.

Officially war was declared last winter when a group of Mexican baseball magnates with well-loaded pocketbooks conducted a "raid" upon American Major League baseball. Despite numerous avowed offers to various and sundry stars of sums appalling to crusty clubowners in this country (topped by a three-year offer of $300,000 for the services of Cleveland's great Bobby Feller) our Southern neighbors succeeded in grabbing only Louis Olmo, a good outfielder, but no star, and a few guys named Joe headed by the Giants' Danny Gardella.

Since then, however, they weaned Catcher Mickey Owen and Shortstop Vernon Stephens from Brooklyn and the St. Louis Browns respectively. Stephens jumped back to his original club, but Owen is sticking it out south of the border, apparently for keeps.

That the threat to American clubowners is appreciated is revealed by the fact that a number of them are seeking legal injunctions preventing the brothers Pasquel, who are behind the whole affair, from dangling lucrative contracts in front of "gullible" big leaguers. But that there is any legal way of stopping the raids seems doubtful.

So far, the threat is not a major menace to the status quo of our major leagues. Despite the seemingly endless flow of silver mine wealth backing the brothers Pasquel, playing conditions in Mexico are not up to accepted American standards.

However, the Mexicans promised to be back next year and the year after that until they had obtained a quota of players. So we can look forward to more acrimonious dealing and double-dealing next winter.

The Davis Cup

Tennis, as usual, is taking the international lead, with the Davis Cup reestablished and the Australians as the defending champs to be knocked off. Incidentally, this looks like a pretty tough job from here, as they have their usual quota of two-handed blasting youngsters and seasoned veterans to make the road a rocky one.

The girls are coming back to cross oceans in search of the Wightman Cup, long an Anglo-American grail of contention, with the possibility that other nations may enter the quest. There will shortly be Walker and Ryder Cup matches again in golf and within a season or two American, British and Argentine polo teams will be battling it out in two hemispheres as of yore.

A Big Brawl

And in 1948, the world will again be treated to the biggest brawl of all when the Olympic Games are slated to take place, barring unforeseen postwar difficulties. These Tower of Babel assemblies in the name of Sport are always good for a couple of riots and innumerable international "incidents" of varying import and bitterness.

The 1940 games were to have been held in Stockholm, which is apparently out of the picture according to current plans. At present, it looks like either London or Paris, with the former favored since the French capital last played host in 1924 while London has not been the scene of this donnybrook since 1908, when Dorando, the fainting Italian marathon favorite, was carried across the finish line by over-ardent supporters, but was later disqualified in favor of the U. S. entry, John J. Hayes. *That* was one for the book.

Wherever, however the games are held, the squabbling amongst officials as well as contestants will go on as of yore. In the first place, no two nations seem to have the same rules as to amateur eligibility. This always results in much pro-calling and demands for rival elimination on the grounds of eligibility.

Draw Your Own Conclusions

Then, what is considered very rough play indeed in one country, is all fair and aboveboard in another. You, dear reader, can draw your own conclusions as to what has happened and will happen again when the nations get together to determine who is the best hop-skip-and-jumper in the world. It

(Continued on page 92)

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The ball dropped into Lodge's outstretched hand

PULL FOR THE FENCE

By HERBERT L. McNARY

On paper, the Romans were the best team in the league and it took rambunctious rookie Bill Lodge, an aging receiver and a clever newspaper girl to show them up!

CHAPTER I

Pony Express

FATE plays a major part in the career of any man, but Bill Lodge felt one had to go better than halfway in forcing the breaks. So now, standing at the hot corner in a Class A park as third sacker for the Ponies in a night game, his every movement suggested eagerness to win. He had no idea that Fate, in the person of Byron C. Prentis, sat in the stands.

Bill was playing a bit too wide of the sack for a right hand batter. The batter, an old timer saw this and pulled hard. A bullet drive traveled low and just inside the chalk line.

Two were out and none on. The Ponies held a commanding lead, thanks mainly to a

AN EXCITING COMPLETE BASEBALL NOVELET

hitting attack led by Lodge, who had contributed two ringing doubles that had reached the distant fences on a line. Under the circumstances there was no need for Bill to extend himself. But on the crack of the bat he dove to his right and smashed down the ball.

Prentis as well as the other fans saw the ball dribble away, but applauded the great stop. So what if the runner did get to first? Lodge's great try had prevented a double or triple.

But Lodge didn't give up this easily. He sprang to his feet, leaped for the rolling ball and, in one motion, rifled the pellet across the diamond from well behind third base. Byron Prentis gasped. The runner had been almost to first when Lodge grabbed the ball, but now the agate smacked into the first baseman's glove as the runner's foot was in the air above the bag and the umpire roared "*Out!*"

"That settles it," said Byron Prentis.

DAN HARKINS and BILL LODGE

The man sitting next to him said, "Huh?"

Prentis forgot that he was alone and on a busman's holiday.

Byron Prentis was the millionaire owner of the Romans. He had lavished a fortune on them in recent years in the vain hope of obtaining a pennant winner. In addition Prentis was a steel tycoon and sat on more directors' boards than he could remember, but his ball club was his hobby. The Romans under his ownership had rarely fallen out of the first division, but had never risen higher than second place.

Bill Lodge, interested in the Romans as he was in every big league club, understood that the Romans never got the breaks, although this puzzled him. Year after year Prentis unpeeled his bankroll to buy some big-name player. And in Bob Condon, Prentis had a manager most experts said was tops. This qualifying "most" was necessary because here and there an expert hinted that "Breezy Bob" was more of a grand guy than a grand manager.

But to get back to the owner of the Romans—best of all Prentis liked to "discover" a ball player. His business interests sent him hopping around the country and, whenever

possible, he took in a minor league game.

The red-checked, white-haired millionaire owner cherished a secret ambition to come up with a star all on his own, but to date he had proved such a poor scout that his purchases had become something of a

Bill realized that one of his banjo hits wouldn't do much good, so he swung from the heels (CHAP. V)

standing joke in baseball circles.

Now, as he watched this young third baseman, the owner's pulses pounded with the joy of discovery. How had this kid been missed? Well, for one thing the season was just under way.

Lodge was coming to bat again as lead-off man for the inning. Prentis' blue eyes studied every move. Lodge didn't appear to be a big man, which was something of a drawback because Bob Condon demanded size in his ball players. Almost every Roman stood over the six-foot mark.

But certainly this kid demonstrated power. He had a powerful chest and shoulders and a tapered body that gave him speed—a roar went up from the crowd. Lodge, a left-hand hitter, had swung at the first pitch. This time the ball didn't travel on a line. It took off with height—and well above the distant fence the ball vanished into the night.

BYRON PRENTIS sat back. He felt certain that not even Barroz, Moore or Kennison, the Roman sluggers, could have hit a harder ball. The Roman owner glanced at his watch.

"Excuse me," he said to the man next to him and rose.

The Romans' owner found the front office of the Ponies and barged in with only a brief knock. He picked out the most likely looking one of three men, a bespectacled man with gray hair.

"Are you the man who has the right to buy and sell players?"

"I'm the president, yes," answered the man wonderingly. "I—"

"Good. I'm Byron Prentis of the Romans."

Recognition and awe came together.

"Why, of course. Mr. Prentis, this is an honor."

"Thanks." Prentis was polite, but in a hurry.

"I have just time to catch a train. I want to buy your third baseman. No time to haggle. Here's a check for ten thousand. You've got a big enough lead to take him out. I'd like to speak to him."

While Lodge was being sent for and the dazed president surveyed the check, Prentis got a thumbnail sketch of his purchase. Lodge had been a youngster with promise who had been grabbed by the Army. In service he had developed physically and as a ball player.

"Right now," said the owner, "he's hotter than a hula dancer with her grass skirt on fire. He may be a flash."

"I'll risk it," snapped Prentis. "He may be another 'Prentis Pet', but I have a hunch I've bought something this time."

Lodge came in, his spikes clicking on the office floor. Prentis saw a square-jawed youngster with direct brown eyes who, perhaps because of his powerful shoulders and thick chest, looked shorter than his five-eleven.

"I'm Byron Prentis," said the latter. "I've bought you for the Romans. When can you report?"

Lodge didn't bat an eye.

"When is the next train?"

"Good," exclaimed Prentis. "There's a train East about midnight. Here's your fare," and Prentis pulled out a fat wallet. "Report to Condon. I'll send a wire. Good luck—and don't let me down."

"I won't," said Bill Lodge grimly.

CHAPTER II

The Latest Roman

BILL LODGE left the train, bag in hand, in a crowded terminal where no one gave him a second glance. The faint idea that he might be met by some representative of the Romans quickly fled. Bob Condon wouldn't be here, of course. He would be on the bench. Bill glanced at a clock. Three o'clock—the game was well under way.

Lodge took a taxi and drove to the ball park. His attempt to get into the park as a new Roman only drew a horse laugh. So he had to buy his way in. That would be something to remember. But even in the front office he encountered a frigid reception. No, there had been no wire from Mr. Prentis. But he could leave his bag and watch the game and come back later.

Bill Lodge took a grandstand seat and glanced at the score. It revealed the Romans leading 5—3 and at bat for their half of the seventh. The last Roman flied out as Bill took his seat. He watched the white-uniformed players trot out to their positions and he spotted players who had been only famous names and were now to be teammates. His pulses pounded.

Most of all he watched Tom Moore, several times picked as the best third sacker in the league—but Moore had long since left thirty behind him.

Perhaps because he was watching Moore so intently he saw the slow start the veteran made when the first batter drove a ball down the line. The smash went into the records as a hit, but Bill felt certain he could have turned the play into an out. The hit unsettled the pitcher and a quick home run tied the score. Then came a walk and a sacrifice.

Moore played the bunt and threw out the man at first. But Bill thought a little faster action and throw might have got the man at second with a possible double play. The difference counted because, after a batter struck out, the next man singled to drive in the tie-breaking run.

"So that's the man I've got to beat out!" Lodge told himself. In so far as records would show, Moore had done nothing wrong, but in Lodge's book the third sacker had been responsible for all three runs.

The Romans lost that game 5—6. Lodge returned to the front office half expecting to see the staff throwing ink bottles around in rage, but everyone seemed to have taken the defeat in stride.

Lodge found that while he had been watching the game the promised wire concerning his purchase had come through. Moreover, Bob Condon had been notified, so Lodge was ordered down to the Romans' dressing room right away.

The sound of singing and laughter that hit Lodge's ears as he entered the stuffy, steam-scented dressing room struck the rookie as out of character for a team that had just let a victory slip away from them. He recognized

the Roman manager from his pictures. Lodge introduced himself and immediately joined the ranks of those who fell under the spell of Condon's magnetic personality.

Condon, like so many of his players, topped six feet and could manage to look down on someone who was merely an inch or so shorter.

"Lodge, huh? Greetings. I like 'em bigger, but maybe you'll grow." The manager stopped the chatter long enough to make a general introduction.

"Quiet, mugs. Meet the latest Roman of them all. Bill Lodge—another Prentis Pet. He must be good. The boss laid ten G's on the line for him."

The introduction brought a few waves and some chuckles. Then the Romans reverted to their discussions. But one player came over. He was slender and bald, with bright dark eyes.

"I'm Dan Harkins," he said with the modesty of one who had been a big league catcher almost two decades. "It's pretty late to get a room. I live in the suburbs and I'll be glad to put you up over night."

The invitation solved a big problem and, more than that, eased the lad's sense of strangeness.

THEY drove out in Dan's car to a nice residential section and a Cape Cod shingle house where a kindly Mrs. Harkins received them. A bobby-soxed girl came downstairs, met Bill and then excused herself to complete her homework. On the piano was a picture of Dan, Junior, a plebe at West Point—and a picture of a girl whose beauty hit Lodge right on the button.

"That's Pat," said Dan, "my oldest girl. Taking journalism at college and has a part time job on the *Chronicle*. Knows more baseball than I do. You'll meet her at supper."

But when Pat appeared, almost at meal time, she had a breezy cub reporter named Dane Hysen with her. For awhile the conversation centered about baseball and Lodge, but then shifted to newspaper shop talk. Lodge didn't mind. He had a chance to look at Pat. With flashing dark eyes and tilted chin, she was as spirited as a blooded race horse.

It appeared that Bill Lodge had created something of a domestic problem because Dan had forgotten a neighborhood bridge date and suggested movies for the three young folks. Pat explained that Hysen had to stand by for a call from the paper. So the trio sat out on the porch.

Once again Bill Lodge played the role of listener until about nine when Hysen's expected assignment came through. Pat and Bill remained on the porch after Hysen departed. There was the smell of freshly cut lawns and budding roses in the air, the soft buzzing of insects, the singing of tires on nearby highways and the warm night sounds of radios and closing screen doors.

"You haven't said yet how you like being a Roman," Pat said unexpectedly.

Lodge explained that it all had happened so suddenly that he couldn't realize it, but that he was fortunate to be with such stars as Bing Barroz, Tom Moore, Kennison, Coulter and others who had been big names for years.

"And what do you think of Bob Condon?"

"As a manager he's tops," said Lodge. "Smartest man in baseball."

"Oh, you're as blind as the rest of them," said Pat unexpectedly. "Dan would hairbrush me for saying it, but I can't help it. The Romans have so many stars that they fail to click as a team beyond the Fourth of July. And Bob Condon is so smart he belongs in a front office and not on a bench. My father is the man who *really* keeps that team clicking."

Lodge understood. He could admire Pat's loyalty, but not her judgment. After all, Dan Harkins was lucky to be on a big-league team at his age and with a batting average of less than .200. But Pat sensed his thoughts.

"I know what you're thinking—but you're wrong. The pitching staff is what keeps the Romans in the race. And it's the way Dan has handled and developed the pitchers that has made them what they are. But I can see it is hopeless talking to you."

She stood up.

"Dan and Mom will be along shortly. I'm going to bed. All I ask is that you keep your mouth shut and your eyes open. It was nice knowing you, Mr. Lodge. Good night."

CHAPTER III

Made Over

LODGE wore a Roman uniform the next day at game time, but he might as well

have been one of the candy butchers in the stands for all the attention paid to him. The local papers had carried only a line or two about his arrival. It was as if the front office wished to spare Prentis the humiliation of another "lemon" purchase.

Lodge sat out the game the following day without having been given more than a few minutes' workout at the hot corner in practise. The Roman's lost both games.

They were losing the third game that Bill Lodge watched from the bench. He was beginning to wonder if there were something to Pat Harkins' criticism after all. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something seemed definitely missing from the Romans' play.

In the fifth with the Romans trailing 2—4, a Cougar lashed out a triple. Ball and runner arrived at third together in a cloud of dust. And when Moore got his feet his teeth were gritted in pain. His bad leg had been injured again. Bob Condon glanced along the bench.

"Hey, you! What's your name—Logan? Go in at third. Let's have a look at you."

Bill Lodge's heart hit the roof of his mouth. He walked out to third base on rubber legs. He would have liked to pull off some sensational play on his debut, but Fate didn't favor him that way.

He held the runner close to the bag. He saw Dan Harkins behind the left-handed batter make a quick motion as though to move him nearer to shortstop, but Bill's mind didn't click immediately. An instant later the batter chopped the ball through the gap and Bill could only watch the ball go through while the Cougar on third raced home with the fifth score. The next Cougar lifted back of second for the third out.

As Bill Lodge headed for the bench Dan Harkins joined him without appearing to do so intentionally.

"There were two out. You didn't need to hold the runner. Besides, Farmer is a chop hitter." Harkins spoke kindly. Lodge flushed slightly as he realized his mistake. He stepped down into the dugout expecting a blast from Condon. But the Roman manager didn't even look at him. Instead he made some unrelated remark to Bing Barroz that got some kind of a laugh.

Lodge scowled. He resented not being bawled out. And didn't like the idea of ball players joking about something not connected with the game when they were losing.

The Romans got the run back in their half of the fifth, but that was all. The sixth inning passed without Lodge having to handle the ball or appear at bat. In the seventh with two out he got his first fielding chance. A ball hit down to him took a bad bounce but he knocked it down. He might have been satisfied with recovery, but as in the minor league game when Prentis had spotted him, Lodge made a catlike grab for the ball and rifled a shot to first.

Bing Barroz had started for the sack when the ball was hit, but as he saw the new third sacker merely knock the ball down, the big first baseman, noted for being somewhat lazy, turned aside. The ball shot across the sack ahead of the runner—but there was no first baseman there to take the throw.

The ball went to the fence and the batter reached third. And then the fans opened up on Bing and made his ears blister. Fortunately the next batter struck out. But Barroz came into the bench fuming. Head lowered, he turned on Lodge.

"What are yuh tryin' to do—make a bum outa me?"

Lodge, just as angry as the first baseman, came right back at him.

"If you had been where you were supposed to be, the man would have been out."

Kennison, the slugging right fielder injected himself into the picture before Barroz could think up a fitting insult.

"Listen, kid, bushers don't talk back to ball players."

And now the manager poured oil on the waters.

"Take it easy," chirped the manager. "No harm was done." But he did turn on Lodge. "Listen, Lodge, with an arm like that be sure you know where you're throwing the ball before you kill someone."

IN A sense that was praise for a splendid throwing arm, but Lodge couldn't see that the manager meant it that way. He gritted his jaws and sat down.

Lodge made his first big-league appearance that inning when, with two out, Gartland doubled and the Cougar pitcher passed Kennison to get at Lodge, who was batting in Moore's place.

Bill got a good hand from fans, who sympathized with his part in the throw to the uncovered first sack. Bill measured the right-field target, where a marker at the foul line read "354 ft." But the bleacher railing angled sharply into right field and

was topped by a wire screen. Bill decided to pull for the fence, anyway. But the Cougar pitcher had other ideas.

After taking a strike and a ball, Lodge saw coming what looked like a fat pitch. He swung as a screw ball darted away from him. Lodge followed the break and connected on the end of his bat. A line hit shot into left field, where the outfielder had been playing him toward center, in normal position for a southpaw batter.

The runners were off with the pitch and scored as Lodge rounded second and went to third on the poor throw to the plate. With the score unexpectedly tied, the pitcher blew up and the Romans finished the inning leading 8—5 and eventually won out 9—5.

So many late-inning runs had been scored that Bill Lodge's contribution didn't stand out. But Bob Condon took notice.

The next morning at practice he took Lodge aside.

"I liked the way you slapped that ball into left, Bill. I can use a place hitter."

"But I'm a pull hitter," protested Lodge, looking toward the barrier in right field where he had already planted any number of dream homers. But the manager had the bland suavity of a politician.

"Don't let that low fence fool you," he smiled. "It has a screen on it, and it angles deep. This isn't a minor league park. You'd be only lifting easy outs by trying to pull for the bleachers. After all you're not built as big as Barroz and Kennison. No, kid, you're the kind of batter who should slap the ball to all fields. I'm going to change your batting style."

A banjo hitter, that's what he was. Bill Lodge set his jaws grimly, but he obeyed orders. Condon changed his batting stance, moved him forward in the box and shortened his grip on the bat. Condon even suggested a different type bat, a bottleneck model.

Playing his first full game that afternoon as Moore remained sidelined, Lodge failed to get the ball out of the infield while defensively he had but three routine chances. For the second day in a row the Romans won by a lopsided score, 8—1.

In the dressing room after the game, Condon patted Lodge on the back.

"Don't let today get you down, kid," he said. "You can't expect to change over and click right away. Anyway, it looks like you've brought us good luck."

This had been the final game of the home stand and the dressing room hummed with the preparations for a quick getaway. Bill Lodge flirted with the idea of getting in touch with Patricia Harkins, but he could think of no excuse that wouldn't sound like an admission that she was right. The closest he came to a contact with the girl was a remark by Dan Harkins as he passed Lodge on the train.

"Pat said to say hello for her. Better turn in early. We've got a tough road trip ahead of us."

Dan Harkins moved on. But his remark stirred two thoughts in Bill Lodge. He wondered just what Pat's "hello" signified and decided it didn't mean much. Then he dwelt on the surprise occasioned by Harkins' statement that a tough road trip lay ahead. Because Dan appeared to be the only one who thought so.

From Condon down he could see that the Romans believed this was the year. The team had broken away to its best start in years, had suffered a mild slump, but then had bounced back in the two last games.

Bill Lodge knew enough about baseball to realize that a road trip represented the major test for a pennant contender. And yet there was something in the way Dan Harkins had said "a tough road trip ahead of us" that indicated a sage minority opinion.

CHAPTER IV

Decline and Fall

THE Romans dropped the first three games on the road trip, losing each contest by a single run. Moore had not even come with the team and Bill Lodge had the hot-corner job until further notice. In these three games, Bill went five for eleven which was tops for the team, but not one of the five hits figured in a run.

There were times when Lodge would have loved to have taken a full swipe at the ball, but he followed instructions and hit with his shortened grip. Twice men had been on second and both times Bill's hits had been into short left field and the runners had not advanced beyond third.

The next day the Romans unloaded for a 14—5 victory. Lodge made only one hit out of three official times at bat. Then the Ro-

mans went into a low-score losing streak and Lodge's batting fell off along with that of his teammates.

While his fielding at the hot corner had not been sensational, he had more than filled the gap left by the ailing Moore. In one of his infrequent comments, Dan Harkins intimated that Lodge at least knocked down balls that Moore would never have tried for.

But Lodge went after everything in reach, counting on his catlike recoveries and rifle arm to compensate for drives he could only knock down. In his eagerness he sometimes cut in front of Bunny Coulter, the shortstop, and got bawled out for doing so.

However, he was by no means as happy as a rookie should be who found himself in big league action so unexpectedly. In a way, he told himself, he might have been happier if he had not listened to Patricia Harkins.

Pat's spirited criticisms weighed heavily on his mind and caused him to watch the Romans' play objectively. He began to see faults not apparent to the fans. For one thing, on the bench, the star-studded Romans talked too little about baseball and too much about personal affairs and other out-of-season activities.

They were high-salaried men, the Roman stars, and almost all of them had ranches and farms or business interests with which they kept in close touch. Lodge noticed that several liked to engage in discussions about breeds of livestock, for example, and this while the Romans were trailing. A man might go up to bat when a hit was needed, fly out and come back to the bench and pick up the discussion again.

Bob Condon seldom objected. In fact he frequently joined in the chatter. Sitting there on the bench, Bob Lodge took the Roman manager apart and marveled at the difference perspective made in evaluation of Bob Condon.

Here was a man whom Bill, in common with so many others, had looked upon as nearly tops among baseball managers. Condon was smart, none could challenge that. He was a college man and his playing career had been studded with smart plays. But he had made early business contacts and was well off. And wealth sometimes deadens ambition.

Looking at him as he stood on the dugout steps, elbow on knee and jutting jaw in his cupped hand, Bill Lodge saw a tall, dark, good-looking man with a magnetic personality. Obviously Bob Condon would have been a success in almost any line of endeavor.

In him, the fans saw a colorful manager who came out on the slightest pretext to "correct" an umpire. That seemed to be the most apt description. He never came off the bench fighting mad. When Condon walked out briskly but with dignity, you almost felt that the umpire must be wrong. He relieved pitchers, injected pinch hitters and switched players with all the furore of a master strategist.

His players, especially the stars, performed similarly. They were crowd pleasers. They knew how to make routine plays appear sensational, but Lodge saw many a drive slip through or drop safely where an extra effort might have caused an error, but might also have turned a hit into an out. On paper, the batting averages read well. But Lodge noticed that percentages were fattened in the high-scoring games where stars turned on the heat when they found the opposition weak. Some of those excess hits could have won close games.

Quite obviously the Romans were a team with whom all was harmony when they were winning. But let the team hit a slump as it was doing at the moment and good dispositions went out the window. Old cliques and grudges flared into the open.

Bill Lodge found himself right in the middle. It was his nature to fight hardest when the team was losing. Other ball players, sensing their own shortcomings, considered the spirit of this rookie substitute third sacker as a reflection on themselves.

TROUBLE flared in a game against the Blue Sox. For a change, the Romans had pulled out in front, but their lead began to melt. The sixth found two out and the tying run on third. The next batter hit a sharp bounding ball headed for the gap between short and third.

Bill moved towards the bounding grounder but gave up as he saw the play properly belonged to Coulter. Bunny came in, misjudged the bounce, the ball slithered through and the tying run came home.

Lodge could feel his ears burning as the next batter fouled out to Barroz. Then, as the players reached the bench, Coulter lit on Lodge.

"Why didn't you take that ball? Trying to show me up! I had no time to set myself after you passed it up."

Lodge was beyond taking blame for something not his fault, even if Bunny had been playing more years in the big league than Lodge had weeks.

"You told me to lay off those balls and not cut in front of you. Make up your mind."

Bunny might be small but he had plenty of scrap in him.

"I'll make up my mind," he fumed and moved toward Lodge.

The rookie third sacker stabbed him with a glare.

"I wouldn't do something I might regret," he said. The very evenness of his tone checked the shortstop. But Bill Lodge definitely had not improved his status with the regulars.

The game remained tied until the last of the eighth when the Blue Sox got men on third and second with two out. For some reason Condon did not order the sacks filled. The batter hit a hard, difficult drive down the third baseline.

Lodge knocked the ball down.

He recovered the ball, but saw that he had no chance to cut down the man at home and in the split second allowed him he decided the runner who had been on second could get back.

His only play was to first and he whistled the ball across the diamond.

The ball was low as any hurried throw might be. It got away from Barroz and a second run came home. Lodge saw himself charged with an error, but he felt certain that Barroz might have tried harder to spear the ball.

The play upset the young third sacker and the next Blue Sox sensed as much. He dropped a bunt along the third base line and caught Lodge flatfooted. He charged in and failed to find the handle. The next batter fouled out to end the inning.

As Lodge came in, head down and hearing a few boos from the fans, Dan Harkins came out of the dugout, ostensibly to pick up a glove.

"Easy, kid," he said softly. "Don't let it get you down."

The Romans showed little evidence of overcoming the two-run deficit in the first half of the ninth, but with two out a pinch hitter walked. Condon let Lodge go to bat, probably because he had used up all his left-handed pinch hitters.

With a runner on first, two down and two runs needed to tie, Lodge realized that one of his customary banjo hits wouldn't help the cause much. So as he swung his bat he allowed his grip to slip to the handle. He swung from the heels. Bat met ball and a long, high one rode the foul line. The hit had distance, a good four hundred feet, but it curved foul by less than a foot.

Lodge came back with only a strike for his pains. The Blue Sox pitcher looked him over more carefully and the fielders moved back. Lodge took two balls and then connected again with a full swing. The ball shot on a line towards right field and a little toward center. The gardener raced back, leaped into the air and speared the ball for the final out. Lodge raced around the sacks only as far as third and slowed up with the discouraging realization that he had been only inches away from being a hero.

Bob Condon was awaiting him at the dugout steps.

"You took a full cut at the ball, kid, and into your pay envelope. That will cost you fifty bucks."

(Turn page)

CHAPTER V

Shipped Down

FORTUNATELY for the mood Bill Lodge was in that night, his roommate went out to visit some friends he had in town. Bill was sitting in bed, trying to lose himself in a magazine, when a knock sounded on the door. Lodge didn't offer any invitation, but the door opened anyway and Dan Harkins came in. Dan sat down on a chair and lit a cigar. Almost bald and in street clothes, the veteran catcher didn't look much like a ball player.

"Had a letter from Pat. She asked to be remembered to you."

"Thanks," muttered Bill dryly. "And tell her so from me. The way things are going, I'll be having a new address soon."

"That's what I came to tell you about," said Harkins. "Don't let a day like this afternoon get you down. Look at that ball you almost put out of the park. A few inches make all the difference between a hero and a bum."

Harkins took a pull on his cigar and crossed his legs.

"Everybody remembers the year old Alexander came in from the bull pen and struck out Tony Lazzeri for what meant the World Series. What people don't remember was that the second strike was a ball Tony drove out of the park foul by a couple of feet."

Lodge remained moody.

"Oh, it isn't just today. It's the whole setup." He was on the verge of saying, "It's just as Pat said." Instead he said, "I've got eyes. I can see. You ought to be manager of this team."

Dan Harkins took the cigar from his mouth and looked at the ash. He spoke quietly.

"If you're a friend of mine, you'll keep such thoughts to yourself. With all these young fellows crowding in, a forty-year-older like me is lucky to have a job on any ball club."

But Lodge wasn't ready to let go. He twisted to the edge of the bed.

"I still say you should be manager. Sure, the Romans have a lot of stars, but what good are they? What keeps the team together is the pitching. And who's responsible for that? You. Who bothers to give fellows like me advice? You. The only real well-played games we have are when you're behind the bat. And as for your losing your job, don't worry. Condon knows he has a good thing."

"Son," observed Harkins, "you've been a big leaguer a month. So you know enough to sound off. I'm not kidding exactly. A new man sees things from a new angle. But there's more to managing a ball club than meets the eye. Bob Condon knows his stuff. He knows how to keep the fans interested anyway. Win or lose, the Romans are a colorful attraction."

"I wonder if they will be when we get back from his trip," grunted Lodge.

Dan Harkins rose to his feet.

"Well, anyway. you're in a fighting mood. I was kind of afraid you would be discouraged. Guess you'll be in there punching."

But Lodge didn't have a chance right away to show his reaction to the fine. Bob Condon made one of his switches. He moved the regular second sacker, Pete Podel, to third and put a spare infielder, Tommy Holtzer, at second.

The net result was two weak spots in the infield. Holtzer was a good batter and valuable pinch hitter, but a weak arm kept him from finding a regular spot. He had failed at third because of his arm, and at second he missed on the all-important double-play relays to first.

So Condon sent a wire to Tom Moore in hopes of checking the Roman's slump. Moore came on, but his very first game aggravated his limp and Condon had to put Bill Lodge back on third.

Lodge felt it would be poetic justice for himself to blossom into the star that might put the Romans back into the win column more consistently, but the breaks didn't go that way. He batted in bad luck. He either hit right at players or they made sensational plays on his efforts. And Bing Barroz nursed his grudge.

Bing was a sullen fellow anyway when the team was losing. Lodge couldn't say that Bing deliberately missed throws to first, but there are times when every infielder must hurry his throws, and a first sacker is expected to dig some balls out of the ground.

Worry about having to make every throw perfect interferes with proper concentration on playing ground balls, and Lodge's fielding became erratic.

The Romans came home to a sullen town that expressed itself through the sport pages. This was the year and this was the team

that was supposed to be a pennant winner. Instead the Romans had dropped to fifth place. Scribes, looking for explanations, could only point to third base.

They were not too severe on Bill Lodge, who, after all, had jumped out of Class A, but statistics showed that when Tom Moore was at third the Romans were knocking at the top spot. While Moore was benched, the Romans had slipped to the second division.

MOORE had recovered sufficiently to go back to third and Lodge went to the bench. The Romans checked their toboggan slide, but Bill felt this was because they were on their home grounds again rather than because of the return of Moore. Watching him from the bench, Bill felt certain that the Roman third sacker had passed his peak. Hits got past him that Bill knew he could have slapped down had he been playing third. Like so many of the other Roman stars Moore fattened his average against poor pitching, but good twirlers found that Moore had lost his former batting eye.

The Romans played five-hundred ball, dropping no lower than fifth place but not climbing higher than fourth. Bill Lodge occasionally appeared as a pinch hitter or runner and sometimes replaced Moore in late innings when the third sacker gave way to a substitute. But for the most part he fretted on the bench.

The Romans weren't getting anywhere and neither was he. He managed another date with Patricia Harkins, but once again the evening turned into an argument on this very subject—the failure of either himself or the Romans to "get anywhere."

"That's a woman for you," he said in exasperation as he brought her to her door. "I'm only a utility infielder. What do you expect *me* to do about it?"

Patricia's dark eyes flashed with fire.

"I don't know. But if I were a man, *I'd* do something."

And so Bill Lodge went back to his rooming house mumbling to himself. Do something—as if there were anything he could do—and then, in the middle of the night, he woke up with an idea.

The next morning Lodge rode downtown to the multi-storied office building where Byron Prentis dominated his many business interests. While he was almost sole stockholder of the Romans, he delegated all operating duties to others except for major decisions involving financial transactions. Bill Lodge had no idea how unusual was his request to see Prentis without an appointment, but his name won him a speedy audience.

Lodge had to walk across a green carpet that was almost the distance from home plate to the pitcher's box before he reached Prentis' ornate desk. Lodge took the proffered chair and came right to the point.

"Mr. Prentis, when you bought me you must have been impressed with my ability to make good."

"I was," answered the tycoon gently. "But don't think I am disappointed. You made a big jump. Don't let this Roman slump discourage you."

"I'm not discouraged," said Lodge grimly. "My eyes are open. Condon isn't the right manager for me—or your team. Sure, he's smart. So smart he's over the heads of his players. Look over the men who have made good when they got away from him and the players who haven't lived up to their records when they joined the Romans. Moore is playing third and I'm riding the bench."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Prentis. "Go over the head of my manager?"

"No, sir. I want you to ship me back to the minors. I think I'll soon prove that I haven't been handled properly."

Prentis frowned.

"As it happens we have a deal on fire with the Class-AA Clippers. I think I can close it by sending you down on twenty-four hour notice."

In the lobby, Lodge called the *Chronicle* and got Pat Harkins on the telephone.

"This is Bill Lodge," he said. "I thought you might like to be the first to know that I am being shipped down to the Clippers at *my* request. . . . Why did I request it? You're pretty smart at such things. I'll let you figure it out."

CHAPTER VI

Twenty-Four Hour Notice

LUCKILY for Bill Lodge, the Clippers could use a third baseman. When he joined the Class AA team he was told he could step right into the line-up. Pete Smith, wizened manager of the Clippers, knew

something about Lodge's career and surmised more when he studied the square-jawed, broad-shouldered youth who reported to him. He wanted to make sure that Lodge didn't underestimate Class AA ball.

"Look," declared Lodge, interrupting Smith, "I was leading a Class A league in batting and home-runs playing my way. I didn't get a single four-bagger with the Romans playing the way I was told. Just let me bat as I want to and I'll bet a hat I hit one out of the park my first game. Two hats if I make it first time at bat."

Pete Smith looked at him briefly.

"You're on," he grunted.

The Clipper fans saw Lodge first on the defensive. He pleased them when, with two on and two out, he made a jack-rabbit stab of a sizzler and zinged the ball across to first for an out.

Coming to bat for the first time, he found a man on second. He teed off on the very first pitch, one the twirler tried to sneak past, and the ball rode long and far into the bleachers. Lodge chased his teammate home and at the bench spoke to Pete Smith.

"The size is seven and three eighths."

The Clipper manager grunted again.

"Make sure it doesn't get bigger."

Lodge got a second four-bagger on his final trip to the plate just to show that his first one was not a fluke, but Pete Smith quickly amended his fear that he might have a showboat on his hands. The lad had confidence but not conceit. He asked plenty of questions in his eagerness to learn. And he had no criticism of Condon or his Romans other than to say that he had not been given a chance to bat and play his normal way.

The Clippers might have entertained some ideas about changing Lodge's style, but not after the way he delivered. Some of the third sacker's actions may have been unorthodox and seemingly awkward, but the boy crashed through. His power through the chest and shoulders and his whipping wrist action gave him more distance than was gained by most six-footers.

At the hot corner he knocked down anything he could reach, and he reached more than the usual third-baseman. His rifle arm made almost every recovery an out. True, his throws were not always perfect, and occasionally a heave took off, but the fans loved his aggressiveness, his willingness and his determination to win.

Lodge sent copies of the nice things the papers said about him the day after his debut with the Clippers to both Byron Prentis and to Patricia Harkins. On succeeding days he sent more clippings until they became almost a regular service. No letter, no word of explanation accompanied the box scores or articles. Bill Lodge let the record speak for itself.

And it was a good record. Bill Lodge joined the Clippers when they were in sixth place. In three weeks from his first game, the Clippers were battling for first. Actually, so closely had the teams been bunched, that the Clippers, when in sixth, were only five games from the top. Nevertheless Bill Lodge could point to the fact that his hitting had definitely won four games and had been a factor in the other victories.

Meanwhile Patricia Harkins caught on and was doing her part through her newspaper connections. The Romans continued to act as if they had reached their level and were content to play the season out in fourth place. Ted Wilks who ran the column "Sports for Sports" on the *Clarion*—the same paper Pat Harkins worked for—began to needle some of the Romans individually as prima donnas, players like Bing Barroz and Moore, who were living on past reputations.

FANS and other writers came back at Wilks, but at least he had started a controversy. Some of the fans sided with him and even some of the sport writers on other papers began to admit that the Romans could stand some constructive criticism.

Then Wilks shifted his range and got Bob Condon in his sights. Condon might be a swell guy and a brainy individual, Wilks declared, but after all a smile and a Phi Beta Kappa key were not the basic requirements for a big league manager. Perhaps the most essential asset was judgment of players, the ability to get the most out of a man.

When this article had stirred up sufficient comment pro and con, Wilks began to cite examples of high-priced stars, bought by the generous Byron Prentis, who had failed to perform for the Romans as they had for others. Maybe Prentis had not been stuck by other owners, as local writers had so long assumed. Maybe these purchased stars had not been handled properly. Then Wilks listed players who had been let out by the Romans only to become stars with other clubs.

When the argument grew red hot, Wilks introduced the case of Bill Lodge. How come

Lodge had been a fence buster before joining the Romans? How come he had been only a banjo hitter *with* the Romans? And how come that with the Clippers he had reverted to knocking down fences again?

Then came reports of front-office friction with the Romans. Rumors had it Byron Prentis had finally lost patience and had pulled some of his stars onto the carpet. Then came rumors of Bob Condon retiring for business reasons or illness.

And then, finally, when the Romans had shown a brief flash as though stung by criticism, only to drop a four-game series to the lowly Mustangs, the report came over the wire that Condon had resigned.

Dan Harkins was placed in charge of the team, but seemingly only as a stopgap. Most writers took it for granted that, following the end of the season, Prentis would come up with a name manager.

The Romans came out of their slump immediately, but Dan did not get too much praise from the experts, since it was pointed out that a change of management invariably acted as a tonic to a losing team. And Dan Harkins was the quiet type who shunned the spotlight.

He made some changes. One of the first almost exploded in his face. The Romans sold Bing Barroz, whom the fans had come to consider a fixture at firstbase. Dan put Tommy Holtzer in his place and this move evoked little enthusiasm. Holtzer could hit, but his slowness of foot had barred him from holding down any regular position.

Bill Lodge read about these changes and wondered where he fitted into the picture. And then, one afternoon when the Clippers were trailing by two runs with two men on base, Bill rode the ball into the bleachers. As he crossed with the winning run and reached the dugout, Smith met him with extended hand.

"It was nice knowing you, Lodge. And that's a swell finish—you've been recalled by the Romans."

CHAPTER VII

Final Drive

BILL'S train dropped him back in big-league territory shortly before eight at night. He telephoned Dan Harkins at his home and got instructions to taxi right out. Lodge found Patricia waiting, but dressed to go out.

"I *would* have a heavy date," she said, "and I'm late now—but I just wanted to say thanks for everything."

"For what?" asked Bill flushing slightly.

Pat shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Well, maybe I'm wrong—but when a player gets himself sent down he must have a reason. I'll be seeing you." Then, at the door, Pat came back swiftly, planted a swift kiss on Bill's burning cheek and hurried out.

Lodge was so flustered that he could follow Dan Harkins with difficulty.

"You had a lot to do with making me manager whether you know it or not," Dan said. "I'm not certain that I'm grateful. Managers don't sleep nights and I like to. However, I got the job and I aim to make a go of it."

"Too bad it's so late in the season," said Lodge. He shifted in his chair. "At least I hope to stop you from going any lower."

Harkins looked at him over the ash of his cigar.

"You're another who feels the hot breath of the second division clubs. The Cougars are ahead of the Blue Sox by six games, but what you and so many forget is that six teams are sandwiched."

"You mean we have a shot at second place," said Bill hopefully.

"I mean we are trailing the Cougars by eleven games and we start a five-game series with them the day after tomorrow. The Cougars will be taking the series in stride. They may even shoot second string pitchers at us. I've been priming mine. I've made other changes. Holtzer will fool a lot at first. He can field and hit, and a first sacker doesn't have to do much throwing. You're the man I'll need, though."

"Can I hit naturally?" asked Lodge. "I mean can I pull for the fence."

"With Barroz gone and Moore benched, I'll need power."

The Romans and Cougars were scheduled for double-headers on Friday and Sunday and a single game Saturday. Bill Lodge made his first big-league homer in that first game—and he couldn't have picked a sweeter spot.

Harkins' charges were trailing 1—4 going into the last half of the eighth. A single and a messed-up double-play soon put Romans on third and second with one out. A pop up

made it two out. Cougar strategy called for walking Kennison and pitching to Lodge. Bill had lined to second, fanned and chased the centerfielder deep for a fly in that order.

The Cougar pitcher, on a three-and-one count, tried to burn a fast ball by. The ball never reached the catcher. Deep in right, a group of bleacher fans jumped for a grand-slam homer that fell among them. The Romans copped a 5—4 win.

In the first inning of the second game, Bill Lodge lined to the left-center fence for a double that scored two runs. Again in the seventh, another long, low double chased Kennison home all the way from first with two out. Those extra base hits counted because the Romans won 6—4.

The Romans had themselves a double header, but no one got unduly excited. Anything could happen in baseball. The Saturday fans saw a real pitcher's battle. Lodge came to Sikoki's aid with two brilliant assists, but like everyone else in that game, was doing little at bat. In the eighth, with two down and none on, the Cougar pitcher lapsed for a moment. He fed Lodge a fat pitch, and the chunky-chested Lodge salted it away in the stands for the only run of the day.

That made it three straight over the Cougars, who had been making a runaway race! The fans really poured out the next day. They saw fine baseball—a Roman team that was smooth and fast and forever on its toes—batters who stretched singles into doubles and worried pitchers on the base paths. Even so the Romans trailed in the opener until the lucky seventh.

Lodge had driven in one run on a long fly, but had otherwise been impotent. Now he came up with runners on first and second. He belted a low liner into the right field corner for a triple. A single brought him home and the Romans piled up six runs that inning to demoralize the Cougars.

The Romans thrilled the crowd by an 8—4 victory, making it four in a row, and in the final and fifth game unleashed a first-inning five-run assault topped by Lodge's third home run of the series. The Cougars never caught up.

In three cataclysmic days, what appeared to be a decided pennant race with less than a month to go, became a dizzy rat race with teams climbing or dropping two or three places overnight. Almost any one of five teams had a mathematical chance at the flag. The Blue Sox actually took over the lead, only to lose it. But the Blue Sox and Cougars had a final series that, it appeared, would decide the ultimate winner.

MEANWHILE the Romans, the team that had dropped the atomic bomb, kept banging away and getting as close as second place twice. Bill Lodge's extra-base clouting and sharp fielding had been a principal factor, although chief credit belonged to Dan Harkins.

Harkins had his biggest test going into the final week of the season, in one of the closest races in baseball history. The Blue Sox led the Maroons by a half a game, having had a game rained out of the schedule, which would not be played. A game behind the Maroons came the Romans, and a game off the Romans were the Cougars.

The week closed with the Romans and Maroons locked in a four-game series while the Cougars were battling the Blue Sox on their home park, likewise in a four-game series. Anyone of the four teams had a mathematical chance of winning.

The night before the opening Maroon game Dan Harkins sat dejectedly with his daughter.

"Pat," he said, "I never wanted to be a manager in the first place. Who is responsible for our being where we are today?"

His daughter stared at him to see if he was joking. She saw that he was painfully serious.

"Why, Bill Lodge, of course. His hitting and fielding since he rejoined the team, but most of all his spirit. I know he has fallen off a bit the past week, but Bill is a winner, a born champion."

"And young," supplemented Harkins, "very young. He is trying too hard. He's lost his timing. I've got to bench him."

"Oh, Dad, you can't," protested Pat. "It will break his heart." But Dan could only look at her with sad eyes.

"I told you I didn't want to be a manager."

And so the next day when the fans poured into the park for the all-important series they found Tom Moore on third instead of Bill Lodge.

"I'm sorry," Dan explained to the almost sobbing Lodge, "Tom ain't half the ball player you are. But he has one thing you haven't got—experience. It wouldn't be so bad if the Maroons weren't loaded with trick pitchers. You'd break your back, the mood

you're in, trying to kill knuckle balls and nothing pitches."

And so Bill Lodge sat on the bench and watched the Blue Sox and Romans wage a tight pitchers' battle almost devoid of spectacular plays. Edwards' fast ball and sinker had the Maroons striking out or hitting into the ground, but against the knuckle ball of Pete Sobach the Romans seemed to be hitting a ball stuffed with sand.

Moore punched out two hits, one of which figured in a run, and had little to do at third base. He proved a steadying influence to his teammates. Both teams were encouraged by the scoreboard, which showed the Cougars beating the Blue Sox. But it was the Romans who finally pulled out front 3—2.

Going into the ninth, the first Maroon dropped a bunt along the third-base line, and beat it out. Bill Lodge was not alone in thinking that he would have nipped the batter on the same play. Then the next batter also bunted. Moore started slowly and then decided to let the ball roll for the only break he could get. And the ball just did trickle foul. But by now every Roman fan was on edge.

Dan Harkins quickly held up the game and sent in Lodge. The applause was evenly divided between Lodge who went in and Moore who came out.

Edwards lost the batter anyway and the tying and winning runs were on base with none out. Another bunt—a sacrifice—became almost a certainty. Lodge crept in close and as he saw the batter shorten his grip Bill put on speed. The batter connected. It looked like a perfect bunt. But it hung in the air. Lodge, tearing in, suddenly left his feet. The ball dropped into his outstretched glove inches above the ground.

Sprawled on the ground, Lodge swung to a sitting position. Both runners had wheeled around and were darting for their bases. Lodge had no chance to make the throw to second. From a sitting position, he fired to first, where Podel, covering, took the ball a step ahead of the runner!

The sensational double-play killed the Maroon rally and the next batter flied out. The Romans had tied for second place and pulled to within a half game of the Blue Sox, who lost to the Cougars.

"Surely," said Pat to her father that night, "you are going to start Bill."

Dan shook his head.

"I can't. We'll be facing Cliff Bowers tomorrow. When he has control, his knuckler is better even than Sobach's."

But Bowers lost his control halfway through the game and the Romans took a commanding lead. Lodge replaced Moore in the seventh and made a sharp fielding play, but on his one appearance at bat he topped the ball, showing that he was still pressing.

The Romans won 6—2 and took over full possession of second place, but the Blue Sox also won to hold their half-game lead.

ALTHOUGH the Cougars had been eliminated, the scoreboard the next day showed them fighting mad. But the Roman fans were more interested in what was transpiring in their own ball park. Today the Maroons got the breaks and came out on top 5—3, to tie again for second place.

The one ray of sunshine for the Romans was the fact that the Cougars had beaten the Blue Sox. So, with the final game of the year coming up, the Blue Sox had only to win to capture the pennant by a half-game. Should the Blue Sox lose again, then the winner of the Roman-Maroon game would be the champion. No wonder the race had the fans dizzy.

Tom Moore had been neither an asset nor a liability in the third game, getting no hits and having only three easy chances. Dan made no changes in his starting line-up for the final game—which meant that Bill Lodge again watched from the bench.

The Maroons revealed their strategy quickly when the first batter bunted safely on the slowing Moore. Patterson, the Romans' pitcher the previous day, was noted for his fielding ability and this accounted for a lack of bunts, but Edwards, who was in again, was a lumbering two hundred pounder.

The bunt led to a run, but in their half the Romans got the run back. When the Maroons continued to bunt, Moore came in on the grass. And now the Maroons, well stocked with right hand hitters, started pulling. Drives whistled past Moore and the Maroons went out front 3—1.

But even before the Romans took another turn at bat a groan went up from the fans. The first-inning score in the all important Blue Sox-Cougar game was being posted. It showed a horse-collar for the Cougars and a big 5 for the Blue Sox.

With that lead, the Romans-Maroons game became almost anti-climactic, even though

second place was at stake. Both Maroons and Romans seemed to lose their gimp. The Romans got a run back, but the Maroons then pushed over another. Then, in the sixth, the Maroons concentrated again on Moore. Bunts, mixed with hard drives along the third-base line, drove in another run and loaded the bases with one out.

Harkins pulled Moore and sent in Lodge. He couldn't have chosen a better spot. An attempted squeeze was fouled off, but Lodge was right on top of the play. His charge probably accounted for the batter swinging from the heels on the next good ball. A line drive whistled for the bag. Lodge leaped through the air, batted down the ball, recovered, touched third for one out and drilled a throw across to first for a twin killing.

Even so the Maroons led 5—2. Bill came to bat the next inning with a man on second, but in his eagerness he hit under the ball and lifted a towering fly to short center and the promised run died.

Meanwhile, something of the same nature was taking place in the Blue Sox park. The score board showed the score changing from 5—0, to 5—1, 6—1, 7—3 and 7—4 in the sixth.

The eighth in the Romans' park found the score 5—2. With two out, Coulter walked and a pinch-hitter for Edwards hit to right. Coulter kept on going and, when a somewhat useless throw to third got away, raced home.

The inning ended 5—3.

BUT things were happening in the Blue Sox park. No score had gone up for some time. Now the spaces under the seventh inning were being filled. A groan went up as a "1" appeared for the Blue Sox. And then a roar that shook the park. A "6" went up for the Cougars. The first-place Blue Sox had blown up, the score was 10—8 in favor of the Cougars!

Right down here in this park was the team that in all probability would be the pennant winner.

And the Maroons were going into the ninth leading 5—3!

With the smell of World Series money in their nostrils the Maroons went out to fatten the score. The first batter swung hard and d ove one out of the park, mercifully foul by several feet. Then he bounced a double off the fence.

Dan rushed in a new pitcher.

A sacrifice bunt back to the box moved the unner along to third. The next batter teed off.

Dan Harkins later insisted Bill Lodge must have replaced his spikes with springs. He seemed to go ten feet into the air. A line drive stuck in his glove. The runner on third had started with the crack, but now he wheeled.

Both men dove head first for the bag, but Lodge's hand slapped down first for the double killing.

Now the Romans were up for their last chance. Podel borrowed the Maroons' strategy and beat out a perfect bunt. Holtzer vindicated Dan's judgment in making a regular out of him by singling sharply.

A new Maroon pitcher, Ace Butler, thei star relief twirler, came in swiftly. He faced Kennison with men on third and first. He ran the count to three and one, made Kennison foul and then fooled him on a curve. It was two out and Lodge was coming up to bat.

Here was a ugged spot for an over-anxious youngster. Dan Harkins, who was coaching on third, met Bill halfway to the plate. Everyone in the park thought Lodge was getting instructions. All Dan did was to place a hand on Lodge's shoulder and look at him.

It was the act of one trying to calm a spirited race horse—and it worked.

Lodge stood at the plate. More than forty thousand fans rose to their feet. The scoreboard showed the eighth-inning score in the Blue Sox Park to be Cougars 10—Blue Sox 8.

"Butler has a beautiful change of pace," Lodge said to himself. "He's counting on me to be over-eager. I'll fool him."

Lodge fidgeted around home plate. Butler fired a fast ball on a level with Bill's nose—and Bill swung. A groan went up from the fans and Butler's grin spread from ear to ear.

Butler put one wide of the plate and Bill started to go after it only to check his swing at the last minute. He kicked up dirt in the box, stepped in and stepped back again. He repeated his almost-swing on another ball.

With the count two and one Butler needed to come in with something.

"This," said Lodge, "will be a change of pace."

Butler took his short wind-up—and suddenly Lodge stopped his nervous shifting.

He became relaxed, watched the course of the ball, timed it and whipped through. Every muscle coordinated. His powerful wrists snapped in a final blow.

There sounded the crack of a perfectly-hit ball. High, high toward right field it sailed. Silence yielded suddenly to a roar from forty thousand throats. Podel crossed the plate. Holtzer tore around the sacks and then slowed as Dan Harkins' hands went up. Dan's face was wreathed in smiles.

"Brother, you can walk home. Bill hit that for a country mile."

Holtzer crossed with the tying run. Bill Lodge's spikes a moment later made it 6—5 and the pennant, because the Blue Sox never caught the Cougars!

"It's a great combination—Harkins and Lodge," said Pat Harkins on her front porch that evening. Of course she was referring to her father when she said "Harkins," but Lodge let her know that he wasn't taking it that way.

"Yeah," he said looking steadily at her. "A swell combination. It ought to be made permanent."

Ben Rogan finds out, the hard way, that a champion who knows fear is no real title-holder!

Ben's right found the boy's chin and the kid went down

LEATHER COURAGE

By WALT BRUCE

HE SHOULDN'T have signed for this bout, he realized dully, feeling a sharp prickle of dread run up his dead legs and along his backbone. Gomez came in like a boring mole, his buck teeth glistening under the arc lamps, his brown, hairy arms flailing.

Ben put out a long left. He aimed for those gleaming buck teeth. But the crafty Mexican came around the jab, came inside of it somehow. He peppered Ben's raw ribs—one, two, three. Ben felt the ropes burn his sweating shoulders and slammed his own fists at the Mexican blindly.

Down at the apron of the ring, a hoarse voice bellowed at him. "Kill that Mexican, Benny! Go downstairs!"

It was nice, knowing the crowd was for you. But that couldn't put any more wind in exhausted lungs. That couldn't soften the impact of the murderous punches, twisting his insides till they burned like fire. He caught a merciless drumbeat of wrenching blows downstairs, bent almost double with pain. Then a sledgehammer hit the side of his chin and he did a grotesque flop on the canvas.

A long way off he could hear the referee intoning the count—the voice cut thin, cut sharply through the crowd's roar.

"Get up, champ!" that same hoarse voice from the ringside was screaming.

Ben tried. It was not the middleweight title that kept his dead legs twitching with

the effort to rise. His title wasn't at stake in this eight-round exhibition with Gomez. It was just that once, three years ago, he had been a fighter. And three years with the A. E. F., fighting for higher stakes all across the bloody face of Europe, had taught him that the time to fight hardest is when you're down, if you don't want some other guy's steel sliding through you.

His instinct for survival was, if anything, sharper. Maybe something else within him had died, though. He was not the same bristling picture of health who had gone overseas. The years alone couldn't help but take something from him. And perhaps something deeper within him was wounded.

This exhibition with the Mexican was the acid test.

He shook his head blindly, hearing the referee's brittle voice.

"—seven—eight—"

Ben set his elbows down on the canvas, forced one weary knee underneath him and lurched erect, staggering drunkenly, as the count went to nine.

He heard the swift eager patter of the Mexican's feet as Gomez rushed at him. Ben flung his arms up dazedly. He felt utterly helpless. He could not see the buck-toothed face of his opponent clearly. The Mexican danced around him on light feet, and Ben jabbed wildly at him. It was like being back in a foxhole, knowing you were down, bleeding, helpless, at another man's mercy.

It came, finally, what he'd known must come. It was solid. It was right on the button. In a way there was mercy in it. It was lethal. It was just the one blinding flash, the pinwheeling lights dancing their grotesque pattern in front of his face, and then—

Nothing!

Doc kept walking up and down in front of the rubbing-table. His long, tired face was red with anger. The black patch on his left eye wouldn't stay in place. He kept jabbing at it. His left leg was crooked—a memento of World War One—and he nervously tried to walk off his impatience with Ben, he limped badly.

"You're crazy, Ben. You only won the title three days before you went in the Army. Whoever heard of a champ racking up without even defending his title once?"

Ben squirmed on the table and rolled on his stomach so the colored boy could work the kinks out of his calf muscles. It was pure hades, doing a thing like this to Doc Winfield. He remembered the day he first met Doc, eight years before, back home in Easton.

Ben had left State College after two years when his father died and had taken a factory job to help keep his mother, brothers and sisters eating decently. Things were tough in those days. His job didn't pay peanuts. He'd done some boxing at State and he'd taken on a fight now and then to help out with the budget.

DOC WINFIELD had taken him on after he'd kayoed a tough colored boy named Burns from Philadelphia. They had been through some rugged times together, he and Doc Winfield. They'd have gone hungry and cold in some of the tank towns they hit, that first year. But Doc had been a scrapper himself, before the first war'd bunged him up, and knocked one of his eyes out. One thing the war hadn't touched was Doc's fighting spirit.

He could be gentle or tough as occasion demanded. He had fought promoters for every last nickel. When things got too tough, he had worked at anything that came along to keep Ben eating right. He'd washed dishes in greasy-spoon diners, he'd worked as a trainer and rubber, he'd sold fight programs. And when Ben protested, and wanted to help, Doc just swore gently at him.

"You an' me are a corporation, kid. My job is the business end, see? Makin' sure we eat and sleep regular. Your job is the fighting. I don't want you to have to think about anything else."

"But—"

"Forget it. We're goin' up there, see? Sure, it's tough now. But we'll make up for it. A couple of years from now, youll be the middleweight champion."

And he had. Mostly, he never for one moment doubted, because of Doc Winfield. And then, before they could begin to cash in or enjoy what they'd slaved for together, the Army grabbed him.

He had been out two months and had worked himself into what he thought was pretty good shape, Now, in five rounds of an exhibition bout, an unknown little Mexican named Gomez had blown his jaw almost off.

He sighed morosely. "You don't understand, Doc," he said. "You don't know how it was up there." He shuddered involuntarily, thinking back to the moment when he'd lain on the floor, blind and dazed, knowing the Mexican was waiting hungrily for him to

stand, his buck teeth gleaming, savagely eager to put the finisher on him.

Once in Chantilly he had lain helpless in a pool of mud and watched a nineteen-year-old kid, a pal, a member of his own combat team, get it. Ben had been kayoed by the stunning blast of a grenade that had landed not ten feet away. He didn't know how long he lay in the mud there. When he opened his eyes a couple of Krauts had come up from somewhere and were kicking viciously at the prone men sprawled motionlessly all around in the mud, looking for possums.

Ben had seen this kid, Bill Link, come to life momentarily and gaze up stricken-eyed at the big Kraut whose boot had slammed against him. The Kraut had pulled out his Luger and cold-bloodedly shot him. Three times, right through the head—Ben's body had jerked and shuddered with each report of that gun as if his own life were being punched out of him.

He had got his Garand unjammed in a desperate frenzy of effort and split-second concentration and in five seconds those Krauts never knew what had hit them. But Ben never forgot that poor kid's stricken, fear-glazed eyes. He couldn't count the times he'd died for that kid in the series of nightmares that had plagued him thereafter.

Was there any way to get the point over so Doc could see it? He wondered.

"Try to see my side of it, Doc. I was down—I was too dazed to keep that murderous little weasel from nailing one to my button, and—well, it was like something that happened over there in—in France. I dunno. Maybe my mind's goin' to pieces. I died up there, when he came in to kayo me. I was right back in the foxholes. I could almost hear the guns crackling, and the Krauts yelling."

Doc just looked at him, his one good eye not blinking.

"You think I don't know how that is, kid? Where'd you suppose I got this eye patch? And this bum left leg? There's millions of us that've been knocked around. You an' me got pushed around plenty before you even went in the Army. I thought we had it figured out that the time to scrap hardest was when things went tough for us."

"It's not the same thing, Doc. It's—"

"It's not so different. We had a dream. That dream kept us going through the bad days. It was the title. But mostly, it was what the title was going to mean for us. The dough, and decent food for a change, and clean sheets to sleep on, and clothes and—a chance to enjoy life. The war didn't let us cash in those dreams, kid. But now's our chance to. I don't know how you can talk about quitting."

"Aw—"

"Remember the things you used to say you were gonna do for your mom? A new house, in a better section? And decent clothes for your kid sisters, and—"

"Cut it out, Doc." Ben couldn't stand it. He was sweating. There was a tight band around his head, pressing his brains in, till he felt like rearing up and screaming at Doc to lay off him. That was weakness, he knew. It scared him. He wondered if that was how they felt just before they went psycho.

"I'll be all right, kid," Doc said in a dead voice. "I'll get me another boy, and take another stab at the tank town circuit. Who knows? I might find somebody real good, and come up with a winner. I ain't finished. I'm only fifty and—"

"Stop it!" Ben yelled it at him. He felt miserable, thinking of Doc going through that grubby rat race all over again. But a pressing hand was mauling his brain and a pinpoint of flame burned just under his forehead. An uncontrollable sensation of dread clutched his shivering body. He could not step into a fight ring again. That was all there was to it.

"I'm through, Doc. I'm quitting. From now on I work for a living."

He could see Doc's lean frame go stiff as a board, the way they had stiffened up over there on the other side when a rifle slug found them and slammed its way through them. Doc sucked a deep breath through his teeth.

"You mean that, kid? That's final?"

Ben couldn't meet the disgust that Doc's single eye mirrored. He dropped his glance toward the locker bench and nodded.

Doc stood there awhile, absorbing the shock of it. Suddenly he swung around sharply and limped toward the door.

"Doc! Doc, where you goin'?"

Doc flung his angry reply over one stiff, proud shoulder.

"Where I shoulda gone three years ago, kid. Back to the tank towns. To find a real fighter."

BEN lay there quietly for a few minutes, while the colored boy impassively

rubbed him. Suddenly he started to shudder convulsively. Great sobs shook him. Doc was gone. He could hardly believe it. The colored boy, no man of stone, spoke soothingly.

"Heah, now, don' you take on so, Mista Rogan. He'll go git hisself plenny drunk, mebbe. He'll come back, though."

Ben tried to control his shaking shoulders.

"It's all right. Forget it," he said to the boy.

"Don' you worry yo'se'f, Mista Rogan. Shucks, man, you's d' worl's champion yet, ain' you?"

The boy's thick sympathy was not what he wanted. Ben went to his locker, extracted a pair of tens from his wallet, and handed them to him.

"Here, boy, buy your girl a bundle of roses. I don't need any more rubbing."

The boy's eyes rolled hungrily over the two bills. He stood debating, then took one ten and handed it back to Ben.

"Ah reckon ten's plenty, Mista Rogan jist fo' a rubdown. But thank ya, thank ya." He turned quickly and walked out of the room.

Ben stared at the closed door numbly. A heck of a note, he thought, when a rubdown boy wouldn't accept a tip from the world's middleweight champion. Could the boy have thought Ben needed that tenspot more than he did?

The reaction of the sports writers was carefully gentle, when Ben announced he was through with the ring, that he was defaulting his claim to the title.

Rogan is close to thirty, old enough surely to know his own mind. We have never held with the school of thought which maintains a fighter owes it to his fans to keep on taking fights against his own better judgment.

The fight business is a hard, soul-searing game. Its exponents risk the ultimate in health, in good looks, even in mental stability in a gamble for the high profits that go to a very few of the lucky.

We feel a man has the same right to quit —when he pleases—that he has in deciding to enter such a risky business in the first place.

Rogan is turning down the fruits of a long, hard apprenticeship before the war, so we feel he must have his own very good personal reasons for quitting.

Our strongest sympathy lies with Doc Winfield. Doc slaved for years to put Rogan on top. And now he's broke—though we hope not broken—but rumor has it he's already come up with a new young middleweight who shows definite promise, a product of the West Virginia coal mines named Abe Cisco.

Atta way to go, Doc. We'll be rootin' for you.

Ben's eyes clouded up mistily as he skimmed the words swiftly. Doc was okay, then. Doc always had possessed the necessary bounce to land upright. Doc was a fighter. It took more than one eye, and a bad leg to stop him.

Ben went back home, where he belonged. He looked for a job and it wasn't quite what he'd expected. If he had got out of the game any other way, he'd have had all sorts of offers, he knew. If he'd just announced he was through before fighting the Mexican, it would have gone down better. People he'd known all his life wound up looking strangely at him, not meeting his eyes, and he didn't like it.

He took a thirty-a-week job as a shipping clerk in the same factory he'd worked in when Doc Winfield first met him. It was dull, it was a clock-watching misery each week day from 8 to 5, but he had to live. Besides, his mother needed what he brought in to keep the house going.

Seven months after he'd fought Gomez, he reached the stage where the war was just a bad dream, like something that had happened during his childhood. It was only when he read in the paper about Doc and his new boy, this Cisco, that the memories flooded back, sharp and incisive. He got the shudders at such times, remembering Gomez, and knew he'd made the only possible decision.

Then one Saturday night he was down at Joe's, having a quiet glass of suds at the end of the bar, and the thing he had dreaded for months caught up with him.

A big Pole, Wisnowski, who haunted Joe's place, and fancied himself as a tough cookie, got a few too many of Joe's ales inside of him. Wisnowski was a loud-mouth, a two-hundred pound muscle-trust who figured the secret of pushing ahead in this world was setting yourself up as a boss and cursing the man who tried to upset you.

About midnight he came staggering down the room to where Ben stood moodily fondling his beer glass, took hold of Ben's elbow, and spun him. He had a clique of his yes-boys grouped in a grinning, half-tipsy circle behind him, and he was a bull moose, bristling for trouble.

"Well, well," he simpered, wiping the back of his hand across his thick lips, "looka here, boys. If it ain't the ex-champeen. All by his lonesome."

"You're drunk, Wisnowski," Ben said coldly, and pulled his arm free of the big Pole's grasp. "Better drift along home now, and stay out of trouble."

The big man simpered. He had a face like a pie, Ben thought. None of the man's nondescript features was well-defined enough to hold the attention. The nose was a smudge of putty, the eyes were opaque and listless, and even the skin was lifeless, a sort of a white color tinged faintly with purple.

"You don't scare me any, Rogan. Drunk or sober."

"No?" Ben lifted his eyebrows, shrugging. He was not scared, though the big slob had forty pounds advantage of him. He knew what Wisnowski was after. Things had been deadly dull since he'd come back to Easton and he didn't care either way how this thing worked out. His nonchalance seemed to infuriate the big fellow.

"No," repeated Wisnowski. "I had my eye on you in here for some time, Rogan. You come in an' stand at the end of the bar and stare in yer glass like you was readin' tea leaves or something. Stand-offish, like you was too good to talk to just anybody. A man comes in a bar, he expects to be friendly. But you're too highhat. You been hauntin' this place for months, an'—"

"You've said just about enough, Wisnowski," Ben broke in matter-of-factly.

IT WASN'T what Wisnowski was saying. It was just that the big guy liked being top dog and Ben's presence was a canker within him. He had to prove up on Ben, before he could reign undisputed. It amused Ben that he could see straight through the big fellow and he let his lips turn up at the corners a little.

Wisnowski's face hardened.

"It'll take more'n you to shut me up, Rogan. You been a slob in my books ever since Gomez plunked you. You left your moxie up there in the Garden."

Ben sighed, very gently. He braced his right leg against the bottom of the bar, making sure of his traction.

"I almost wish you hadn't said that, pal," he said.

He let Wisnowski have the right. It was a good punch. The mothballs clung around the edges of it, but it was an impassioned punch. Wisnowski had called him yellow and he couldn't stand that. He had to live out his life in Easton and Joe served very fine beer out of the only clean coils on the street.

The big slob never knew what hit him. It was right on the button—but solid. Ben felt it all the way up to his shoulderblade and his knuckles stung as if he'd dipped them in hot water.

It was no sneak punch. He had warned his victim and then he had struck with the speed of a rattler. *Clop.* The big Pole threw his arms out like a man about to take a swan dive off a fifty-foot board. He hit some of his backers-up full in their grinning geezers and Ben chuckled hoarsely.

He watched the grins slide off the faces, down to the floorboards. He watched Wisnowski's elephantine fall. Dust spumed up from the cracks where the boards joined each other, and one of the watchers coughed fitfully, uncomfortably, as he stared down at King Wisnowski.

Ben picked his glass off the bar, leaned down and slashed its contents full in the big man's face. Wisnowski choked, spluttered, sat up, looking sheepish.

"Get out, Wisnowski," Ben said agreeably. "Before I get sore and do a real job on you."

The man got up sullenly and walked out to the street. His friends moved behind him.

"And good riddance," Joe was saying, behind the bar. "Maybe now I can attract some decent trade in this joint. Thanks, champ." The proprietor picked up a glass and drew it brimful of amber fluid. "Here. Reckon the house owes you a set-up, for the one you wasted."

But Ben Rogan was halfway to the door already.

"You can set yourself up to that one, Joe." There was a bright glint in his eyes, and his voice was exultant. "Me, I'm back in trainin'. I'm goin' back fightin'."

It took him a solid hour of phoning to locate Doc's hotel in New York. Doc's voice had a brittle edge on it.

"So you figure you're cured, hey?"

"That's right," Ben announced happily. "Look, Doc, I been thinkin' a lot about us—I mean, about the old days, an'—"

"You figure I oughta take you back, huh? I got a boy, pal. Ain't you heard? Name of Abe Cisco. I don't run out on my fighters, pal. I figure the Golden Rule—"

"But—" Ben gulped. Doc's voice was like ice water, dripping out of the ear piece.

"Look, pal—once I put my hand on the stove, I'm cured, see? You burned me

once. I wouldn't touch you again with asbestos gloves on."

There was a dull clicking sound.

"Doc! Doc!" Ben rattled the lever on the phone rest. It was no use. He hung up, gulping dryly. He felt an uncontrollable surge of black agony sweep through him. He had known Doc was sore. He hadn't known Doc hated him, though.

He started getting back in shape at the local sweat suite. Once he let it out that he was going back fighting, he had all kinds of offers. He finally agreed to let a weary little gym hanger-on named Georgie Stone act as interim manager for him.

Georgie had done time as a circus roustabout. He had worked three years with carnivals throughout the country. He had even fought three pro fights as a welter, and had his face bashed out of all recognition. He looked like a jockey in a second-rate movie and he sometimes tried to take on his own weight in hard liquor. He was honest though, if nothing else, and he could wag his tongue with telling effect, when he wasn't hungover.

"You book 'em an' I'll fight 'em, Georgie," Ben told him. "There won't be any contract, and there won't be any strings tied to either of us. But we'll both make some money."

Georgie grinned hugely. He was flat broke as usual and the prospect of handling the ex-middleweight champ, for even a short while, looked like a lake full of gravy.

"Fair enough, pal," he said and his yellow teeth flashed with anticipation. "You an' me, we'll show 'em."

They did, too. They showed Buss Baker a fine view of the ceiling rafters atop Convention Hall, down in Philadelphia. Baker lay flat on his back after two and thirty of the first round but his vision was slightly impaired as he stared upward numbly.

They knocked Luke Day over in three rounds up in Boston. Kid Jervis stayed the limit the following week, but Ben slapped him silly.

He was hung up like wash over the top rope, when it ended.

Then it happened. They were booked for a semifinal in the Garden on the same bill in which Abe Cisco was fighting the wind-up.

BEN didn't see Doc till it was all over. But he knew Doc would be watching him. He pulverized his man in three rounds for another kayo, went back to throw something over his tights and then stood near the exit to watch Cisco go against George Douglas.

Cisco was chunky, with a bull neck, huge, muscular arms, and a piglike face with so much concentrated viciousness in it that Ben had to shudder. He watched Doc's new find come out, when the bell rang, stalking the colored boy, George Douglas, like a mean mountain cat.

"Doc's really come up with something," he said to Georgie. "He's solid as stone, but somehow, he's still graceful. Doc's taught that boy plenty."

Georgie scoffed. Georgie made sounds like a manager at him.

"Heck, kid, you'd blow his seams loose before he knew what day it was."

"Yeah?" Ben said gently. He wasn't sure. Deep down, where his heart made conclusions, he knew he was looking at a fighting machine of champion caliber out there under the arc lights. You get to know those things instinctively after you've spent a big enough slice of your life pushing leather.

The suddenness with which Doc's new hope unleashed himself brought a startled roar from the patrons, and set Ben back on his heels, gasping. One minute Cisco was craftily walking around the colored boy, Douglas. The colored boy looked scared, kept snaking a long left out to keep Cisco off him.

Cisco feinted a left with blinding speed, shifted his weight on his feet, and crossed a blistering right to the cheek. It made a wet, plopping sound all the way back to where Ben stood watching dumbly. Douglas went down like a man on the gallows, when the trap springs beneath him. He looked stone dead, not even twitching, while the ref counted over him. Cisco stood disdainfully in the corner, a bulldog's grin on his flat face as the crowd screamed a mixture of surprise and disgust at the sudden knockout.

Ben shook his shoulders, like a man coming out of deep slumber. "I told you, Georgie," he said. "The guy's a—" But Georgie was gone.

Ben went looking for him back in the dressing-room. He wasn't there either. Five minutes later, he showed. A clique of bright-eyed newspaper men followed him into the room. He had Doc Winfield and Abe Cisco with him.

Ben's eyes met Doc's one good one, and it was like old times for a brief moment, as if they had never been away from each other.

He was remembering two years in the tank towns. He was remembering Doc washing dishes, to keep them both eating. He was remembering a lot of things, and the regret of what might have been lay heavy within him.

" 'Lo, Doc," he said thickly, and turned to face Cisco. "Nice going, pal. You got a right hand like greased lightning."

"We ain't here t' make pretty speeches," Doc said coldly. "Your manager here—" he waved at Georgie, and his voice slurred a little, as if he disapproved of Ben's choice to replace him "—Stone tells me you figure you're ready for Abe. I just wanted to hear you say it before we let the newspapers spill it."

Ben gasped. Cisco—he wasn't in shape yet for Cisco! It takes time when you're thirty. This flat-faced killer was a colt compared to him, with the stamina and drive of the twenty-one years that hung so easily on him. In three months maybe, but—he could kill that Georgie!

He cleared his throat miserably, feeling the pressing weight of the eyes all around him, feeling judgment being passed on him. He spoke quickly, recklessly.

"Sure, Doc. You name it."

"A month from now," Doc said flatly. "Right here, in the Garden. All right?"

"All right," Ben said numbly. He watched the sober group trickle out. He watched the wedgelike shoulders of Abe Cisco slide through the door, and his legs turned to water. The door closed and he turned fiercely on Georgie. "What the—"

"I hadda get 'em while they was hot, Ben. Cisco's gettin' bigger alla time, ain't he? You'd 'a' hadda stop him sooner or later, you wanna 'nother shot at the title. If I knowed you felt that way about—"

"All right," Ben said wearily. "All right, Georgie. You meant well. Forget it." He felt a lump inside him, pressing his ribs. It was inevitable. He'd known that—but not so soon. His comeback trail had been cushioned with ham-and-eggers. He had not been on the canvas since the bout with Gomez.

A needling small voice drummed away at his inner ear.

"What'll I do if Doc's boy puts me down there?"

The ring lights glared, the crowd was noisy and raucous. It was all much the same, Ben told himself. The great stage of the Garden didn't change down the years, nor was there any essential change in the drama purveyed to the cash-paying patrons. Only the actors changed.

His face was familiar tonight. So was Doc's, over there across the ring, whispering terse advice in the flattened ear of Abe Cisco. But he and Doc were not the same people. Doc had turned hard, some part of his soul had shriveled inside him.

Ben didn't know how great the change in himself was. Maybe none. Maybe plenty, where it counted. He would know, though, he realized, within the hour. He would know when he started slugging things out with Abe Cisco.

This was his first big fight in a year. He was sweating—he was clammy cold with it, though the big room was stuffy hot. Georgie kept prattling like a magpie. It didn't mean anything, all the old worn-out corner music. He wished he had Doc back. He had not known how badly it was going to cut, having Doc in the other corner.

"Save it, Georgie," he said. "I don't need it." Georgie clammed up, looking like a small wounded duck, and Ben said swiftly, commiseratingly, "You been fine, Georgie. You've done yours, pal. From here on in it belongs to Ben Rogan."

The announcer was finally reaching the end of his introductory song-and-dance out there. He beckoned. Ben flung the yellow kimona back off his shoulders and went out, standing across from Abe Cisco.

The kid looked nonchalant, almost eager, as if he had parked his nerves in his locker before coming up here. He was a cocky bulldog. He looked as if he ate ex-champions with sugar and milk every morning at breakfast.

The referee was mercifully brief.

"You boys know what that sell-out crowd's lookin' for from you. I don't want any waltzing. Break quick, when I tag you. Keep 'em up, and save yourselves' trouble. All right, tag up—and come out fightin'!"

"Set, kid?" Georgie said. Ben nodded and Georgie was outside the ropes, and then the bell was ringing, like a sonorous death knell.

Ben went out slowly, watching Abe as he'd watch a rattlesnake which had just given its warning signal.

THE kid sparred awhile, then feinted the left, as he had against the colored boy last month. Ben stepped a foot to his right, slipped the punch neatly over his shoulder

and stepped in, flinging a solid right at the kid's middle. He was grinning. It was always better, once they'd got to each other.

He peppered the kid's floating ribs with a couple, then stepped back and away, half turning. It was a maneuver that had become instinct to him. It was his exit maneuver, when he'd had enough close stuff and they never knew what to do with it.

Cisco knew. Cisco whammed him with a lightning right to the side of the head. Ben felt his knees buckle. He saw the lights overhead start to swim around in pretty circles, like a spinning roulette wheel. He grunted and got on the bike. He backed around the ring for ten full seconds, breathing hard, shaking his head, his arms crossed over his upper body.

The kid was a tiger. He came clawing in. His fists were rocks. They kept hammering into Ben's stomach, chewing the flesh to raw ribbons. Ben finally got his head cleared so he could see straight. He nailed the rash kid with a straight left and tagged him smartly over the heart with a hooked right. They were butterfly punches but they set Cisco down for the moment.

He coasted the round out. He sat panting in his corner and Georgie fussed at his face with the sponge and toweled his chest roughly.

"You all right, Ben?"

"I've been a chump, Georgie. Doc knows all my stuff like a book, inside out and backwards. I didn't think it'd matter. I need my head examined."

"That kid ain't got nothin'," said Georgie. "You was givin' him bullets inside, Ben. You keep up with that an you're bound to nail him."

Ben glanced up at him. Georgie didn't know, he thought wearily. It was going to be rugged out there tonight. But Georgie looked happy, proud and excited, here in the Garden. Was there any real use, Ben wondered, in telling him?

It was much the same in the second—a lot of sparring, a lot of circling each other, fangs bared, like two snarling wolves. Then came the quick stab, the boring in for a quick exchange and the break, when the kid would belt him with that lethal right hand. Ben expected it this time. He could not avoid it completely, but he could fall away with it. He could lessen the jolt.

And in the corner again, he could look over at Doc. He could wonder how long it had taken Doc to drill that into the kid. He could watch Doc's grim face and imagine what a belt Doc must be getting out of this fight, seeing how nicely all his plans were working out.

He kept away from the kid for the next three rounds. He wanted an opening, some weak point in the kid's airtight armor. The kid wasn't clever. He was no Tunney for brains. But he was a natural. He was all instinct, all born gouge and pummel. And he was graceful, murderously fast.

Ben's ancient legs weren't going to stand much more of this killing pace, he knew. He grew desperate, knowing he had to find that one big shot soon, or he'd wind up with a hospital nurse feeding him cream of wheat for breakfast.

He made a play in the sixth, partly because his engine was coughing, partly because of the abuse the bloodthirsty crowd was heaping on him.

"Step it up to a foxtrot!" some ringside wag bellowed. It got Ben sore. He complied.

He let the kid nip him with a left, pulled him off balance, then suddenly ducked and went in, both hands gouging away at the boy like a pair of steam-engine pistons.

It was change of pace. It caught the kid with his shorts down for a second. But the kid was a stone. He recovered almost at once and they stood there, toe to toe, pouring out leather.

Ben felt his face coming apart like melting butter. He took them over the heart, he took them downstairs and his stomach felt like what's left of the Christmas turkey on New Year's day.

A cannonball came out of the maze of sweat and flying leather he worked in. It hit him squarely between the eyes. He heard a clicking sound in his neck. His head flew back numbly. He hit the rosin so hard he bounced like a ball.

It was funny. He could almost see. Black shadows screamed at him and gesticulated above the ring's apron. He knew they were there, and he didn't. He was stunned, but not out. He just sat there, vaguely aware that the referee's arm was pumping water out of the deep well he'd plunged into.

This was it. This was the nightmare he had been carrying with him. He was down there. He was helpless now. He could stand up, and he could let this coal miner from West Virginia kick the roots of his brain loose from his skull, if he wanted. Like that kid, Bill

Link, lying glaze-eyed in the mud in Chantilly, watching the Kraut pull a gun out and plug him.

Like Gomez—he had died against Gomez, just as surely as Bill Link had. There are degrees of dying. Ask the man who's been cut down alive off the gallows.

But something queer was going on inside him. This wasn't Chantilly, this wasn't the gallows, and this wasn't dying. He wasn't frightened. He wasn't scared. The months of inaction, of simple forgetting, had swept his soul clean, he realized. A hot flame of exultation climbed through him. He grinned a crooked and bloody grin and stood up.

Cisco was ready. Cisco hit him twice in the stomach, doubling him over, then whammed one against the side of his chin. He sat down again. The referee pranced over to him. He shook his head and told himself he must not lose this fight. He was a champion again—a champion still—and now he knew it.

HE WAS in Cisco's corner. The haze in front of his eyes lifted slightly. He saw Doc Winfield's single eye burning fiercely into his own, like a vision out of the long-ago past. He blinked, puzzled. Doc's face was twisted with excitement. There was a wet smudge on his thin cheek.

Ben thought with amazement, "Why, he's crying!"

Doc's voice, when it came, was a choky whisper. He looked like a man who has just had a fight with himself and emerged defeated.

"Get up, kid. You're the world's middleweight champ, remember? He knocked you blind and you came up scrapping—" Doc swore at him. "Get up! That kid can't carry your lunch in a prize ring!"

Ben stood up drunkenly. It was all mixed up. He couldn't unravel the crazy thing that had happened. He kept the kid away from him as well as he could, still sopping up a few punches. And then it hit him like a grenade blast had once hit him. Doc was *for* him! Doc wanted him to pole this kid over!

"For you, Doc," he thought. "For what used to be and for you, I'll see if I can do it."

He was able to see clearly now. The shock had done that much for him. He didn't tip that to friend Cisco. He acted drugged. He moved around punchily. He watched the boy swing a looping right at him. It was a good punch, too. It had the kid's hopes and dreams riding it piggy back. Had it hit Ben, it would have killed him.

But he was quicker than that clumsy right hand. He was a foot to the right, then ducking in fast, on a line with the boy, who had followed his hope punch off balance. Ben ripped his stomach with a left, throwing his arm in the soft, unsuspecting flesh up to the wrist, as if he were planting tomatoes.

The kid made a noise like a pig. His mouth came open. He bent in a half jackknife, groaning, and that was when Ben really let him have it. He poured them to the boy's face, to the heart, to the short ribs. He worked in a frenzy. There was not much left inside of him, he knew, not much to work with. He had to keep this young bull-ox on the defensive.

His right hand found the boy's chin again, solid, square on the inviting target. It was all over then, as quick as it started. The kid went down, his legs twisting grotesquely beneath him. He hit the floorboards with a clump like a sack of mail on a train platform, and just as lifeless.

They went crazy. You'd have thought he had just kayoed Joe Louis. They had seen the rebirth of a champion. There was love and gratitude in the screaming voices. The sound followed him all the way up the aisle, two minutes later, and as he pushed through the throngs of well-wishers he wondered who started that old gag about fight crowds being heartless.

"I'll find somebody good for you, kid," Doc was saying urgently. He was talking to Abe Cisco. The kid looked stunned. He had had the best manager in captivity, in Doc Winfield. It was slowly sifting through his ringing head that all that was finished. He looked miserable, browbeaten.

"Doc, it ain't—" Ben said.

"I'll give you three grand to forget our contract, Abe, and round up a good new man to handle you," Doc said. "How's that listen to you?"

Greed flickered briefly in the kid's puffy eyes.

"Gosh, Doc, I—"

"You know how I hate this," Doc said, groaning. "It's just—well, let's face facts. I'm no more good to you. Not after tonight. Tonight my own boy came back to me"—he waved at Ben—"the boy I built into a champion. My heart's always been with him, deep down. It'd just be no good, for us to go on. I'd mess things up for ya."

"Okay, Doc," Abe Cisco said. He looked

lost, still stunned from the kayo. But he had a rubber soul, Ben thought, and not in his shoes, in his heart. The kid's aggressive self confidence snapped back into place like elastic. It would not have taken three thousand, Ben realized, watching the slow smile twist Abe's battered features.

"Doc, about Georgie," he said. "I—uh—well, we both knew it was just temporary, but can he stay on as a trainer or something?" He looked at Georgie Stone. Georgie flashed a yellow-toothed grin, as if to say, "Thanks, bub."

Doc's lean face smiled. Even the one good eye smiled a little. He stood straight as a ramrod, and his newfound pride hung like a mantle on him.

"Why shouldn't he stay, kid? A champ needs his retinue, don't he? From now on we'll need front, see? Big time. Kid, after tonight you'll need Georgie to shoo the autograph moochers off ya."

"If They Don't Give Us a Team, We'll Just Go Ahead and Get Up Our Own!"

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THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

By WILLIAM J. O'SULLIVAN

Blue Devil defense veteran Roley Menkert had an excellent reason for taking it easy — but when the kid forwards got in trouble because of him he played himself out of a job!

HE FELT a vague irritation when the showy but raw young forwards sticked the puck across the Canadien blue line in another smash for the goal. The packed Garden came alive with a roar at this last-minute, Blue Devil thrust.

"That's not the way," he muttered, as he relaxed at his guard position. "Holy Cow, don't they ever learn? That ain't the way at all!"

"They're fast, Roley. They'll do."

"Roley" Menkert looked back from his position at Poke Miles, in the net for the Blue Devils. Miles, Menkert and Con Mehaffey were the last of the old Blue Devil line-up of the 'Great' Blue Devil days—and compared to Roley's length of service Poke

Miles and Con Mehaffey were comparative youngsters, too.

"My niece is fast on skates, too," Roley cracked. "Think I ought to get her a tryout with Baldy Crain, our new 'master-mind,' as the sports writers call him?"

The puck was being shuttled back and forth between the fast Blue Devil tyros, Scotty Stuart and Flash Lemoin. The burly Canadien defense was moving in with the savvy of a pair of smart tom cats blocking off a rat-hole.

"Big crowd, considering we've won one out of four," Poke said. "Oughta have a good season."

"Uh huh." Roley eyed the serried, moon-like blobs of faces. "A lot of guys with nothing to do. Sixteen thousand guys with time on their hands and dough in their pockets. Well—get set! The Boy Scouts have lost the puck again."

Poke Miles grinned, but there was as much of grudging admiration in the grin as there was of amusement. He took in the flat, gray eyes of the veteran defense man, the scarred, spread nose, the wide, thin-lipped mouth.

Roley Menkert—big, powerful, hard-boiled Roley. . . .

Howard Menkert, it really was. Some forgotten decade ago, a sports-scribe had tagged that other on him. *"Old Man Menkert, he just keeps rolling along. . . ."* And for a season that was now just a collection of names, dates and scores on yellowed records, it was 'Roll-along' Menkert.

Seasons came and seasons went—and came back again. And with them came Roley Menkert. He'd played in more Stanley Cup games than any other man living. He'd played every position in hockey at one time or another.

"And could yet!" his stoutest supporters maintained. "Even now Roley could go with the fastest of them—for a short time."

But there was no short-time philosophy in the hard-bitten soul that was Roley Menkert. The fires of youth that may once have burned brightly inside the patched and stitched frame of Roley Menkert had long since been stoked to a carefully-calculated, cannily gauged expenditure of energy to maintain a glow of life. In this case, 'life' meant staying in the league as an active player.

"There's two classes of big-time hockey players." Roley had voiced his credo to Poke Miles more than once. "Those who do; and those who *did*. Me, I want to do. There's no pension list in this racket."

With a speed that belied his age the veteran toured the blue line with the youngsters

"The Quick and The Dead," Poke had said. "The living and the dead. That's it, huh?"

"You got it," had been Roley's answer. "Don't forget it!"

The Montreal forwards had picked up the puck at center-ice, had deftly stepped around Blue Devil Center Mike Carey, were winging with deceptive effortlessness across the Blue Devil blue line. Roley looked over to his left at Boots Filladeau.

"Come on, come on, Boots! Close in on 'em! Make 'em take a long-range shot! Those tomatoes haven't enough zing to get by Poke, at a distance!"

His less experienced mate moved up—but uncertainly. Roley feinted as if for center-ice, and the Canadien with the puck tried to squeeze between him and the boards, Roley moved swiftly.

There was a *thock* and a banging of bodies into the boards, and the crowd yelped excitement when Roley came away with the puck to skate carefully forward, then rifle it to Mike Carey for another sally at the Montreal net.

IT WAS beautiful to watch, Roley's defense work. It was as faultless as it was smooth. It was like watching the works of a watch that would move smoothly from stopped-still to studied, purposeful life—and then go so dead-still when its function had been accomplished, that you thought maybe it had never moved.

But it was irritating, to some. And among these was Baldy Crain, the new Blue Devil coach and manager.

"Smart?" that harried and worried former player had barked, when Roley was being discussed—as Roley was often being discussed. "My old cat is smart, too! He eats, lies down in front of the fire and don't move again until another meal is ready. Me, I like action, fire, life!"

He was saying it again, to Marsh Burns, a sport scribe, as he watched the Blue Devils drop this game to the Canadiens, 5—2. Marsh nodded.

"Pretty good defense man, though. Eh?"

Crain grimaced.

"When I get a better one, he'll be in there. And Roley will be where he belongs. In the records."

Burns grinned.

"Got one in mind? A better man?"

"I'm never tired of looking," Crain growled. "Never tired of looking—oh-oh! That's it! The game's over!"

It was over for the public.

But in the dressing-room Crain was saying his fill to the players. His language was clean, but his eyes were not.

"Well, I was right! You can all of you skate. And a few of you even act as if you were in a contest! But if this is what you call a team, well—I was just brought up wrong! You, Stuart?"

Scotty Stuart sat on the bench, his blue eyes anxious. He ran a hand through his blond, curly hair and licked his lips. "I can see why Rivière is the best goalie in the league," the youngster said, uncertainly. He flushed and looked his apology to Poke Miles, near him. "I mean, I just couldn't beat the guy. Often enough."

"You get net-fright," Crain snapped. "You cross over the blue, and you let the sight of Rivière hypnotize you. Instead of making a stab, rifling to Flash and then getting in position to take a pass, you barge right in. And lose the puck. Or give Pete Rivière an easy clear."

The man wolfed them with his small, dark eyes, eyes that came to rest on Roley.

"I'll tell you what the trouble is! With *all* of you. This isn't a team. It's a collection of individuals wearing the same uniforms, that's what! Now, you, Menkert!"

Roley, dressed for the street, was in the act of biting the tip off a cigar. He looked up briefly, nodded, snipped the cigar to his liking and lighted it. He let a cloud of smoke form from the short, quick puffs he took on the tobacco.

"Don't you feel well, Menkert?" Baldy Crain's tones were parental, solicitous. "I mean, you didn't move around much. I'm sorta worried about you, Roley, old boy! How did you feel out there?"

Sardonic amusement tipped the veteran's gray eyes.

"Oh, I managed to keep the blood from congealing," he said. "'Course, I wasn't as comfortable as you were—sitting there nice and warm and protected."

Crain flushed at the general laugh that went up.

"I'm not paid to perform on the ice," he snapped. "You are!"

"Oh." Roley looked at the tip of his cigar. "Didn't I—perform? I mean, to your liking?"

The coach met the old-timer's steady gaze

for a long minute. He tasted the threat in that question. Roley knew that four of the five other teams in the league would welcome him. And Crain knew that the veteran knew it. He tasted the threat, and didn't like it. But he had to let it go. He cleared his throat.

"The Canadiens scored five times to our twice," he said. "Is that your idea of the sort of defense work that is going to get us into the Cup Series?"

"When the Canadiens hit the ice," Roley said, mildly, "it is a free-scoring game. For the Canadiens, anyway. If you're going to beat them, you'll have to do it up front. The way I figure, we did a good job to hold them to five goals. Those lads are hot."

"And those lads are a team!" Crain snapped. "Right? A team!"

Roley nodded.

"They do all right," he said.

Crain worked them over carefully and without partiality. He promised shake-ups, benchings, fines. He ended with the observation that from here on in, practice would be rough if the games were not.

Carey, Stuart and Lemoin caught up with the veteran as he was on his way to the street. It was the blond, lively-eyed Stuart who opened the talk.

"Boy, that guy has his nerve, jumping *you*, Roley! I mean—gee, *you!* Why, you were playing hockey when that guy was trying to learn shinny from his older sister! Heck, you're a pioneer at the game!"

Roley winked at Poke.

"Oh, I'm not that old. Let's see—that would make me a player back in Eighteen Seventy-five. No—"

"Aw, you know what we mean," Lemoin said. "Boy, you are as smooth as syrup from a clean pitcher. The way you blocked those guys out, and all!"

Roley spoke mildly.

"The Canadien defense men didn't seem too bad, from what I saw. Well, we can't win 'em all. Relax, boys, relax. It's only a game. Look—a bunch-a-thousand guys got nothing to do. Eight, ten, eighteen thousand. A bunch-a-thousand. So what?

"So they come to the Garden, or some other place. and they pay to get in and watch. Well, we get into our monkey suits, and we go out and plug around for an hour or more. They get their money's worth. We get our money's worth. Everybody is happy. See?"

THE three youngsters regarded him with steady eyes—but they were eyes that looked for the joker, somewhere. Stuart laughed, but it was a sharp, nervous bark.

"You're joking," he said. "Hockey means more to you than *that!*"

Then Poke Miles was chuckling, was prodding Roley's ribs.

"Sure, he's joking! Why, it means so much to Roley that he just puts on that crust, sort of. Like if you have an injury, a physical hurt, you don't want anybody to know about. At heart, ol' Roley is just burnin' up every minute of the game. Right, Roley?"

"There's a lot in what you say, Poke," the veteran murmured. He looked at his old mate queerly. "Yep. A lot!" He forced a laugh and said to the youngsters, "Though our backs may be broken, we are out there to die for old Siwash. Or Blue Devil U. Right, fellers?"

The group broke up on a general laugh and they drifted off. But Poke stuck. He talked to Roley, as they swung down the street.

"Look, fella, I'm not going to criticize, or lecture, or like that. Get me?"

"Yes, Mister Crain," Roley mimicked an aspiring rookie. "But *do* tell me! I mean, I am all ears, Mister Crain, sir!"

"And your ears," Poke grinned, "are busted and warped, like the rest of you. No, Roley"—the net-tender sobered—"maybe you can't remember, or don't care to. But I can. I mean, when you were breaking in? The anxiety over each game, each period, each play?"

"Buck fever," Roley grunted.

"Or team spirit," Poke offered. "Maybe it isn't smooth, or smart, or savvy, but it's won games, pennants, even. They got it, those kids."

"Maybe it's all they got!"

"Maybe it's all that's worth having!" Poke challenged.

"Yeah?" Roley stopped, his broad scarred face close to his old mate's. "Can I tell you a secret, junior? And you won't tell no more than maybe seven million people here in New York? Well, they make 'em pay to come in and watch us! I'm not kidding! I bet you thought they just let 'em in to cheer for us or something!"

Poke shook his head.

"Old Roley," he said. "Hard-boiled Roley. Well, maybe you been around longer than

me, fella. Maybe you know."

"*Maybe* I know! Huh!" He threw his cigar to the street and trod on it. "Just maybe I don't know, Poke! I been playing hockey so long, I almost forget the time when I didn't play, it's that long ago!"

Poke nodded slowly. "Uh huh. You been playing so long, Roley, I think maybe you have forgot a lot of things. And I'm sorry for you if you have. Well, see you at practise."

"Wait a minute!" Roley said. "What do you mean, you're sorry for me? I can paddle my boat okay, junior. You don't need to be sorry for me, now or any other time!"

Poke shrugged.

"Have it your own way. 'By, Roley!"

In the taxi on the way across town, Roley sat in somber meditation. He stirred and thought.

"Poke is a smart guy. He can say things that hit home, that express just the way you feel."

He wasn't thinking of the talk of team spirit, though, nor of things that old Roley might have forgotten, along the rough years of big-time hockey. He was thinking of those words—

"It's like a crust . . . like if you have an injury, you don't want anyone to know about."

For a frightened moment, he wondered. Could Poke know anything? Could he *know?* But he dismissed it after careful thought.

"Nobody knows but me. That's all. Just me."

The short life that was hockey's season worked through a month of its allotted fifty games and found the Blue Devils disputing the cellar spot with the Boston Bruins.

The Blue Devil forward combine picked up smoothness and speed and savvy, but so did all the other teams in the league. And the Montreal outfit lorded it over them all in a threatened runaway similar to last year's.

Baldy Crain fretted through stormy practice sessions and talked himself hoarse before and after games. But the Blue Devils plodded on in the same now-we're-good-and-now-we-aren't fashion.

Railing at them after a close loss, Crain yelped long and loud.

"Whaddya think the fans come here for? To look at you guys? That what you think, Stuart? Oh, no! You don't think so! You—Menkert! You think the fans come here to look at you stand around the ice like a guy who maybe got there in the rink, somehow?"

ROLEY shrugged.

"If they do, I'll meet 'em down the street and let 'em look at me for half price. That way, they'll get a better look, and I'll make more dough."

He got up and buttoned his pencil-striped coat around his blocky chest.

"Another thing, they won't have to listen to all this eye-wash I got to listen to. I'm getting fed up with this lip-lather, Crain. Let's you take a workout on someone who is earning it, and that ain't me."

The coach's face was strained in the silence that followed.

"In other words, you are doing your best, giving all that is in you, playing your top speed every minute. Right, Roley?"

Menkert considered the man.

"What do you want me to do—go chasing over the blue with the other laddies when we get the puck? The rules haven't changed. They still let only three men over at one time. Remember? I stop what comes my way."

"Not all that comes your way, you don't!"

"When I do stop everything," Roley said, flatly, "I'll get paid for three men's work. What do you think I am—an All-League combination of two defense men and a goalie? Look, Crain, why don't you admit what's wrong? Why don't you admit that, the way you are coaching, it will take two-three years to make this combine a winner!"

"You're drawing a hundred dollar fine for that crack!" Crain blared. "How's that?"

Roley grinned.

"I'll make you a deal, Boss. A reasonable deal. Here it is—*if* the sports-writers don't agree with what I've said, I'll pay it. *And* give a thousand bucks to any charity you can name. And, Mister, I don't give my money away!"

Crain nodded, his eyes hard.

"You know your money, okay, my friend. You maybe can be beaten on defense, but if a nickel ever got away from you in the front office when the contracts were being drawn up, brother, I want to *see* that nickel!"

"And you're just working for free," Roley nodded. "But let's admit what's wrong, huh? You know your onions when it comes to deals and trades. But if it was up to me, I'd say you are working the team wrong.

"Well, it isn't up to me, so forget it. You run the team. I'll play my position. The day you think I can't, trade me. But that 'fine' racket doesn't go until you prove I'm laying down on the gang, or busting training rules. Reasonable?"

Crain was smart. He had let this thing get away from him, but he saw a chance to save his face with the team.

"You are just excited, Roley. I guess I lost my head, too. We'll forget the whole thing, but don't let it happen again. Okay?"

"Who lost whose head?" Roley blinked. "Whaddya mean?"

"You're just as anxious as I am that we win every game we play," the coach said smoothly. "You're a big name in hockey. About the biggest name there is playing today.

"I don't blame you for feeling the rest of them are quitting on you. But don't take it out on me. Now, there's a couple new plays I want to discuss with the team, and in practice tomorrow—"

Roley stared at the man, opened his mouth to say something, then turned to look when someone nudged him. It was Poke.

"Shut your trap and let it blow over," Poke murmured. "I know, I know! But let it go, will you?"

Later, Scotty and Flash came over to stand near him, and the blond kid started it.

"Look, Roley—we feel like the dickens about what Crain said. We don't mean to let you down. And from here out, we'll play better hockey. That's a promise. Okay?"

Roley frowned.

"Listen, you kids! You're doing swell right now! Coming along fine! The team is playing right up to its level the way we are going. Don't get any funny ideas about it. Understand?"

Lemoin scuffed his toe on the floor, embarrassedly.

"It's nice of you to say that, Roley. But Crain is right. Just watch us from now on!"

Roley shook his head in despair when they had gone.

"Get a load of that!" he told Poke. "Friend, they are all balmy around here!"

"Everybody but you," Poke said. "Like Paddy in the parade, you are the only one in step! How about a sandwich?"

Roley shook his head.

"Not for me. I don't dare! With everything fouled up the way it is, the sandwich might bite me instead of me biting it! *You* haven't been telling these kids they are laying down on us, have you? Because they haven't been. They're doing fine, for rookies."

"Gosh, no!" Poke said. "I swear I haven't, Roley." But he stood in thought for some minutes after his old mate had climbed into his taxi.

"But it's an idea!" he murmured, as he moved out onto Eighth Avenue.

CRAIN drew him aside before practice, next day.

"What you got on your mind? You made a crack that I wasn't running the team right."

Roley shrugged.

"I'm not the coach. But I played forward once. In this game, you pay off in percentages. Right? The more shots you have at a goalie, the more your chances of beating him. But only *reasonable* shots! Not just fire away, me laddies!

"Too, I'd mix my stuff better. Have the kids charge the defense head-on a few times, even if they don't have a chance to rifle the puck. Lay into those other guys! Get them to expect that. *Then* switch back to trying to get by 'em.

"That way, the defense don't know what's coming. They get set for a smash, and *zip*—you go around them. Next time, maybe, or a few after that—sock 'em and rock 'em! But like I say, you are the coach, not me." He gestured. "The kids are coming on okay."

But that was not the way Crain passed it on to the youthful forward wall when he put them through some new passing plays in practice.

"Hold it, *hold* it! No wonder Roley says you guys don't fool even the near-sighted ice-sweep! Mix up your stuff! Show 'em a change of pace! Bust their seams for 'em, a few times; and then breeze by the next try or two! No wonder Roley is disgusted!"

However disgust was not the emotion with which Roley viewed the first five minutes of the Black Hawk invasion, that night.

He saw with wonder the flashy, fast-skating forwards charge over the Chicago blue with express-train speed and lose the puck in a head-on smash that brought a gasp from the crowd. The puck was retrieved by the Black Hawk goalie and shuttled back of the net to a defense man. The other defender was picking himself up from the ice, his eyes hard.

Again, the forwards rode hard into the opposition, and when Roley shuffled the puck back up-rink following a close Chicago try Flash Lemoin's dark face was grim with determination.

Deftly the pair stepped along, shuttling the puck over and back, then went into another apparent berserk rush—only to swing wide of the braced defense. The Black Hawk goalie moved to his right, swifted left when the puck blasted across the rink, then scrambled hastily back—but too late.

A roar rocked the smoke-laden air when the red light flashed the score. Scotty skated near Roley and grinned.

"That the way you want us to do, Roley?"

"*Me* want you to do?"

"Yeah. Watch us from here in!" The kid rubbed his chest ruefully. "Boy, they sure beat us up some, though!"

Roley's eyes went beyond the safety-net and met Crain's gaze. His lips moved in comment on the coach, and none of it could be said to be complimentary.

Flash and Scotty made more than their customary visits to the penalty box that night. But nobody complained. The Blue Devils made more than their customary share of goals. They topped the Chicago aggregation, 7—3.

After the game the rookie forward-combine came to Roley and grinned, but crookedly. Flash had a mouthful of loose teeth from his meetings with the Black Hawk huskies and Scotty sported a swollen face and a black eye.

"Maybe you won't think so badly of us now," Scotty said, for the two of them. "But, Roley, am I *sore!* It'll be worse later."

Roley was serious, with the light of desperation in his eyes.

"Listen, fellers," he said. "There's two kinds of hockey players. Those who *do*, and those who *did*. That stuff got by with the Black Hawks. But don't start throwing your weight around when we hit the Red Wings or the Canadiens, because, believe me, you ain't got weight enough! I *know!*

"My last game as a forward was played against those gorillas! Kids, they'll just"—he had been about to say *'bust your backs,'* but he changed it,—"they'll just classify you among the those-who-dids! Anyway, where did you get the idea I was criticising you?"

Scotty grinned.

"It's okay," he said. "You were right."

Roley turned to Poke.

"Poke, have you ever heard me say the kids were laying down?"

The veteran goalie licked his lips.

"Well, now, I wouldn't say those were your *exact* words. But you certainly can't say that of tonight's game, eh, Roley?"

Roley cursed long and heartily after the rookies had gone. But Poke only shrugged it off.

"You know it's right," he said. "Crain hasn't had them changing their pace enough. So what?"

"I don't want them to think I'm responsible," Roley said. "It isn't my business. What I said to Crain—"

"Oh!" Poke cut in. "So you did say something, then."

"Just that he didn't coach a versatile forward-wall."

"So he took your tip. So it's okay. So what again?"

"When these kids try that stuff on the Canadiens it will be just too bad. Remember my last game as a forward?"

Poke grunted, his eyes lighting with the recollection.

"Do I! Frenchy Latour never played again. Soldier Bardonne was out for the season. Bull Sousy opened up like a zipper! And you—you never played forward again! That was—let's see—that was in January. . . ."

"December eighteenth," Roley cut in. He shook his head. *"That's* a date I'll never forget! Well, Bardonne and Sousy are still with the Canadiens. I don't want to see those kids try working on *them!* Soldier, and Zipper Sousy, forgot more rough work than those kids can ever learn!"

"They're old, now," Poke said.

"So am I," Roley murmured, "but don't let it fool you, junior. I still can get mean, a little!" He sighed. "But I don't have to and what's the sense, anyway? It's better this way! Take it easy, it's only a game!"

BUT the Blue Devil forward-wall didn't take it easy with the new tactics that had worked so well against the Black Hawks. They tore into the Bruin series with a string of four victories and two ties as the payoff on their new attack.

The Boston team managed to chop out one victory in a game so savage and hard that the sports columns began to *tch-tch* the legal mayhem of it.

Crain, when asked for an expression of his opinion, shrugged.

"Sure, it's hard. But it's clean. Man, it's hockey!"

It was hockey that was fattening the Blue Devil points-column. And then the team hit Montreal.

The rookie combine hit the Canadien rock-ribbed defense. And the rock-ribbed defense hit back with a vigor that sent Scotty off the ice to have three stitches taken over his right eye. But the Blue Devil duo scored.

The hockey-mad town had turned out a capacity crowd for the series and the place was bedlam when Roley, his mouth hard and his face a controlled mask, went over to confront a swarthy, veritable block of a man playing Canadien defense.

"No rough stuff on these kids, Soldier," he told the man flatly. "Keep it clean!"

The Canadien burly grinned.

"They started it. But how about you, eh, ol' boy? You come along, *mon vieux*, we glad to see you, *mon ami* Sousy and I! We give you a great, great welcome! Such a pity you no longer play forward! Maybe you get hurt, that time, eh? Remember that game?"

"Look," Roley sighed. "It's a nice way to make a living. It's a nice way to die, too! Let's go easy, huh? I'm watching you!"

He skated away when the time-out period was over and the injured Scotty back on the ice. The Montreal forwards got the puck and made a hard rush, which Roley broke up with some clever, but legal, blocking.

A disappointed forward skated after Roley and fought to get the puck, but the smooth defense man easily fooled him and got the disc away. The Canadien lost his head and threw a punch.

The place was in an uproar when Roley blocked it and hit back. The two offenders went to the penalty box, and an all but imperceptible change came over the game—a transition from hard hockey to grudge hockey.

Roley's eyes tightened when he saw that his old foemen, Sousy and Bardonne, had been pulled out while he himself was off the ice. The two huskies sat in their box, eyes intent on him, grim smiles on their faces.

When his time was up, Roley climbed back into the rink and saw the two others come out again. He tried to fight down the surge that paced his heart faster, to steady down his breathing. He couldn't. It was on him again, the old excitement, the love of conflict that had been a thing of the past for such a long time.

He blocked with new zest when the next Canadien charge came down-ice. His man was spilled hard, and he drew a warning look from the assistant referee. But he just grinned at the man, a challenge in his eye.

Then Flash Lemoin was fast-stepping the puck across the blue, was sweeping out to avoid Soldier Bardonne's block. And it happened.

The rookie forward's skates became entangled somehow with the veteran Frenchman's stick and described a parabola of shimmering light. Even the spectators grunted, so hard was the fall.

The whistle shrilled and Bardonne, protesting that it was an accident, was shunted to the penalty box. Flash was carried off the ice. Sandy Bristol took his place and the game continued.

But with the next play, the Canadiens scored and Roley looked at Poke.

"My niece could have stopped that one," he said flatly. "What's eating you?"

"How badly was Flash hurt?" the goalie countered.

"Just knocked out." The veteran defense man looked around at the racket when the whistle blew for time and a Blue Devil sub was coming out. "See? Here comes the kid now. Just dazed, I guess."

Poke shook his head.

"The fur will fly now, for sure. That kid is sore as a burned pup!"

Roley grinned tightly.

"You're not just saying that, either. The fur *will* fly, and ol' Roley is going to give it a bit of a boost just to start it off right!"

"Whaddya mean?" Poke asked, frowning. But Roley had skated away.

WITH the next Canadien thrust, Con Mehaffey and Roley worked smoothly and broke it up, Roley taking the cleared puck around behind the goal and working it out and up-ice. At center-ice, he feinted a pass to Mike Carey, then held it and snapped at him.

"You stay back! I'm going in, with the Boy Scouts! Got to see a couple of guys about an Airedale!"

"*Huh?*"

But Roley was away, was expertly sticking the puck over to Scotty, taking a return and swiveling it to Flash—was crossing the blue in the rising roar of the stands that saw the move, saw the grim Canadien defenders come out of their momentary stupefaction

to meet their old enemy

Watching from the bench, Baldy Crain grunted.

"Well, I'll be—" He came to his feet, his eyes wide, then dropped back to drink in the drama of it—the meeting of those old war-horses of the ice in front of him.

The rookie forwards were grinning widely as the old slam-bang rover of hockey's wilder days teamed with them. Scotty took a pass, feinted a slam, then wafted expertly to Flash. The dark little speedster faked a shot, then slid the puck to Roley. Just then Bardonne and Sousy closed.

Roley struck, but it was clean, legal. A man had a right to go through! He struck Soldier Bardonne with a low shoulder, then caromed off in a half-turn into Sousy. He just had time to get the puck away before all three of them went down.

The stands were in an uproar when Flash and Scotty closed on the hapless goalie and feinted him into a block. The red light glowed even before the three veterans were on their feet. Sousy looked his chagrin.

"You'll be back, no, *mon ami?*" he asked.

"With pickin's easy as this waitin' for me?" Roley scoffed. "Junior, I can't wait!"

"I nearly break your back once before," the swarthy Frenchman said. "Maybe this time I fix, eh?"

"Oh, you busted it, okay," Roley laughed. "Cracked a couple vertebra, anyway. But me, I got 'em to spare. I'll see you!"

Sousy saw him. Bardonne saw him. Crain saw him. All of Montreal saw him, to judge from the racket of it.

With a speed that belied his age, the veteran toured the blue with the two youngsters, his mouth agape with the effort that his speed was costing him, his nose showing twin trickles of crimson, his left eye closing from the searing contact with his old foemen.

The two Frenchmen took all he had to give and waded back for more, grins on their swollen lips and murder in their eyes. After another terrific mix-up, Sousy let himself be helped off the ice. And as he went, his eyes found Roley.

"Like old days, *non?* Ah, well, Bardonne will fix you!"

And Bardonne did fix him—but too late to help the Canadiens, who were trailing by a 5—1 count.

The Blue Devils had absorbed the shock of it, of the erstwhile rough-riding forward coming out of his cocoon of six years of cagey, smooth play into his old roaring style—absorbed the shock of it and fused suddenly into a cohesive, well-knit, heads-up gang that trod the ice with a challenge ringing from their blades and fight and savvy written in their every move.

"Take it easy, you old goat!" Poke shouted at him. "You have made history as the world's only defense-forward wall! Slow down! Whatinades is the matter with Baldy, leaving you in!"

"I want to see the man who can take me out!" Roley snarled.

He stole the disc from a Canadien forward, snapped it to Flash and hit hard up-ice again, crossing the blue abreast of the two youngsters. His eyes were hazed by smoke, by sudden ice-blindness, by something—he didn't see Bardonne coming until the Soldier hit him with a legal block.

THEN, for a while, he didn't see anything at all—not even the crowd of Montreal fans stand in roaring tribute when he was carried off the ice—not even Soldier Bardonne, his own eyes misted with something that was not ice nor smoke, follow on weary, clumping feet.

"You old fool," Crain said. "You bull-headed old murderer!" He looked at the Montreal club's doctor. "You think he can hear me?"

The little man smiled slightly.

"I hope not! I do not wish blood spattered all over me."

"I hear you," Roley murmured. "I couldn't watch those kids go down and tackle that pair of apes-on-ice I used to battle. I felt responsible, sorta. Darn you and Poke!"

Baldy Crain smiled tightly. His eyes took in the full, scarred frame that was stretched out on the rubbing-table. He eyed the yards of broad, heavy adhesive that mummified the middle part of the veteran star's body.

"How's the back feel? Easier?"

Roley's eyes winced.

"You know?"

"Doc, here, said you'd passed out from pain. He got to looking around for the cause." The coach-manager grinned. "We knew an old war-horse like you wouldn't quit over a busted snoot and multiple contusions. Well, he says your back is sorta crooked. Probably has been for years. Right?"

Roley nodded.

"Couple of vertebra cracked. Outa season, I wear a leather-and-steel cast, to strengthen

it. In season, I take heat treatments. I figured—well, not many managers want to play a guy with a busted back.

"It hits me like rheumatism now and then. Hard to move around. I—I guess that fixes my cart." His voice turned bitter. "What a sucker I am! I coulda got by for awhile. Now look at me! Out of the do-plays into the did-plays! Right?"

"Right!" Baldy Crain said. "You bet!"

Roley closed his eyes.

"There's no pension list in this racket. Either you do or you don't." He looked at the manager. "How are the kids, okay?"

"What do I care?" Crain asked.

Roley's eyes went hard, but he couldn't sit up because of the tight bandaging.

"Huh? Whaddya mean?"

"You sure'n Jupiter worked yourself out of a job," Baldy said. "Except for an occasional skirmish—protected by the proper back brace—you are through. But just by the sheerest luck, old boy, there was a job open as coach of the Blue Devils. You're elected. So, it's your worry how the kids are, from now on. How does it sound, Roley?"

Roley lay silent a minute.

"This is it," he whispered. "Like old Poke used to say, 'The Quick and The Dead.' And I must be dead and listening to the voices of the angels. Because it surer than fire can't be that bald-headed old crab I once worked for. Or can it be?"

He opened his eyes again and a broad smile spread the swollen and split lips.

"Shove him vertical, Doc, and let's get him dressed," Baldy Crain said brusquely. "You said it's okay for him to hobble around? Okay, okay, let him get busy and earn his money as coach. Nobody is paying dough to look at *him!*"

Roley made a number of comments about his boss, much of it profane, and all of it complimentary.

The entire team disliked Coach Stormy Weathers, but he disregarded that and kept right on trying to make it the best darned team in the world in

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●

ATOM-BOMB BURNS

By TRACY MASON

Tom Marchant's sensational grunt and groan artist was sure charged with destruction—and he mowed down one powerful opponent after another, until he seemed just a bit too good!

CHAPTER I

Wrestling Freak

AN UNCTUOUS voice spoke loudly, in hearty tones.

"My friend, Sammy! Have a cigar."

Sam Whiteford looked up from his typewriter and groaned. The beaming smile that illuminated the face of the short, rotund person descending upon his desk found no reflection in Whiteford's gaunt, lined features.

"That boy, Shorty," Whiteford groaned, glaring at the advancing fat man. "I'll fire him for this! I told him I couldn't see anybody, much less you."

The jibe bounced off the rotund visitor's sensitivity like a bee-bee pellet ricochetting off armor plate. There was not a tremor in the smile, not a hesitant motion in his advance. The pudgy paw which proffered the dark, rather wilted cigar, did not waver.

"A cigar for you, Sammy pal," he said. "I remembered I owed you one on the last Garden fight. Just now I happened to be passing by and I says why don't I drop in while I'm in the neighborhood."

Whiteford leaned back in his chair and ran long fingers through his graying hair.

"Look, Tom," he said wearily. "How about being a good friend—a real, put-'er-there pal—and dragging yourself out of here? I've got tomorrow's column to write, and Sunday's, besides looking over the Sunday stuff these morons who learned how to typewrite think is feature material. And, besides, I know all about why your boy dropped that one in Hartford last week."

"That bum," scoffed the little man. Without invitation, he dropped into a chair beside Whiteford's desk. The cigar he tucked back into a vest pocket in a swift motion that would have done justice to a sleight-of-hand artist. "I'm through with that bum. He went into the tank on me, the crook. And he didn't leave me in on the fix. I wish you'd write him up good, Sammy pal. I fired him. I tore up his contrack. Naw, I don't want to talk about him, that no-good."

"How about that cigar?" Whiteford asked.

Reluctantly, the sports editor pushed himself away from his typewriter. Many years had taught him that to try to work while little Tom Marchant was having his say required more effort than the building of the pyramids.

With an injured look, Marchant pulled the cigar from its resting place and hesitantly placed it on the desk. Whiteford picked it up and regarded the gaudy band carefully.

"Where do you get these things?" he asked. "And what did the guy who makes them do during the war—besides manufacturing smoke pots and white sulphur mortar shells?"

"A fifty-center, and he says that!" the undersized fat man mourned. Then, hopefully, he added: "But I keep forgettin' you don't smoke cigars, Sammy pal. You're a pipe smoker. I'll bring you a pound of tobacco like you never tasted next time I see you."

"No, you don't!" Sam Whiteford said. He placed the cigar in a desk drawer and closed it firmly. "I've got a brother-in-law who smokes cigars and—well, this is for him. Special. Now, what's on your mind, Tom, and make it fast. I've got work to do."

As Atom-Bomb Burns reached forward and put the whammy on his opponent, there was a blinding flash, a glare of blue light and the famous Killer Coyle went over, flat on his back

TOM MARCHANT leaned as close to the desk as his bulk allowed. His voice was lowered to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Sammy pal, I have got the find of the century," he crooned. "I have got a bum—a boy who positively will revolutionize rassling in this country."

"It could stand it," Whiteford murmured.

"No kidding, this bum is terrific. Wait till you see him. I know how you feel about rassling being strictly on the crooked, and all, but this bum I got, this new boy, he don't need to make any deals. All he's got to do is, why, just put a hand on the other guy and it's the old whammy. He don't have to pin 'em down with no locks or holds or spins or nothin'. All he needs is to put one finger on the other guy, see, in a certain way and it's Katie-bar-the-door."

Whiteford reached for his pipe and made a mental note to give "Shorty" Marchant more than the usual amount of panning.

"Like those 'doctors' you had wrestling for you a couple of years back?" he asked. "Those birds who could touch a nerve center and the other man folded up or went into a screaming act?"

Tom Marchant made a gesture of disdain.

"Them tramps," he said. "They was fakes, I find out. They could give me a chiropractor treatment and I could still beat any one of them. But this new fella's terrific."

Whiteford reached for a pencil and pulled a sheet of copy paper over toward him.

"Okay," he said, with a sigh. "Let's have the dope and then beat it. What's this new bum's name?"

Tom Marchant reared back in his chair impressively, his hands on his knees.

"Atom-Bomb Burns!" he announced.

"Oh, my gawsh!" Whiteford exclaimed. He slammed down the pencil and petulantly pushed the sheet of paper away from him. "I'm blasted if I'll write another word about any Atom-Bomb guys, wrestlers, fighters, race horses or even bowlers. Ever since Hiroshima, every time some manager has to think up a name for something it comes up Atom-something. No soap, Tom."

Marchant leaned forward again. He glanced about the busy office with its clacketty uproar. The little man's eyes held a look that was almost furtive.

"Sam," he said, and his voice had descended to that ultra-confidential level again. "I know I give you some bum steers. It's natural in this dizzy business. But, so help me, Sam, this is the goods."

He glanced about the room again and turned back to the man behind the desk.

"Sammy pal," he breathed. "I wouldn't believe it myself, if I didn't see it. This is the straight dope."

"What's the straight dope?"

"This bum can actually knock a guy kicking by just touchin' him," Marchant said. The awe in his voice impressed even Whiteford, and to impress the hard-bitten sports editor of the *Star-Scimitar,* everybody agreed, was something that often was tried and seldom accomplished.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he said now.

"I—I was in Phoenix, Arizona, with some of my bums," Marchant began. "I heard about this bum, this Herbert Smith—that's his real name—from a guy which approaches me, y'might say. He tells me Smith can knock a guy for a loop with one touch in a certain way. So I can always go along with a gag and I tell this guy to bring the bum around and he does and this Herbert Smith, he just touches me an—whammo—I land up on the floor wonderin' when the roof caved in. He don't no more than touch me, Sammy, so help me."

Whiteford shook his head slowly.

"Tom," he said, sadly. "I've handled a lot of would-be funny columns on those trained water buffalo of yours, but the thing has worn pretty thin. That Hindu hypnotist was the last one, and I warned you he was going to be the last. Suppose you peddle this human electric chair of yours to Dan Parker or Bill Corum, or even Jimmy Powers. But the boss expressed himself in no uncertain terms not long ago that any more stuff on your freaks was out."

"Sammy pal, just this one," Tom Marchant pleaded. "This is for real, Sammy! Lemme have him give you a sample, Sammy. If he's a fake, why okay, we're quits and no hard feelin's. I won't never bother you no more. But just look at him, Sammy. Just see if what I been tellin' you ain't true."

WHITEFORD shook his head and rolled his chair up to the desk again.

"If you think I'm going to allow myself to be heaved around the place by one of your gorillas, you're nuts," he said. "I've got work to do."

"Not here," Tom said. "I wouldn't bring him here. You want I should let some of

them other hyenas in this business see the most valuable piece of property ever been in rassling?"

"Other hyenas, is right. Sorry, Tom. Try somebody else."

In desperation, the little man clutched at Whiteford's sleeve.

"How about—" he gulped "—dinner tonight—on me?" he asked. "I want you should see him first, Sammy, on account you always give me a break where you could."

Whiteford leaned back in his chair, staring at the visitor in unconcealed astonishment.

"You mean—you mean you're going to buy me dinner?" he asked. His voice was incredulous. "You mean you're actually going to pick up the check?"

Tom Marchant nodded dumbly. It was obvious that he had been overcome by the horrid realization of what he had said.

"That's a date!" Whiteford said, heartily. "Any time Tom Marchant buys a dinner, I want to be there. That'll be a column in itself. Let's see, I'll be through here at about eight, if these journalism school graduates get their copy through under two hours late. I'll meet you at Leone's at, say, about nine o'clock."

"Leone's!" Marchant bleated. "How about—"

"Leone's!" Whiteford repeated, with emphasis. "Leone's or the Atom-Bomb Kid is just another bum on your string. Not that I'm promising anything, understand, Tom."

The little round man quivered noticeably, swallowed twice, and spoke in a dismal voice.

"Okay, Sammy—pal," he said. "Leone's, at nine."

And that, Sam Whiteford told himself as he watched Tom Marchant—strangely droopy about the shoulders—leave the office, is the last I'll ever hear of this new phony of Tom's.

He was wrong.

Partly because he was curious to see if Tom really would show up, and mostly because nine o'clock of any night except fight night is a good time to find the fellow members of Sam's craft huddled in that pleasant place with its excellent food, Whiteford paid off his cab at the door of the restaurant and walked into the bar. He said hello to half a dozen men who were in the same work he was in and ordered an old-fashioned.

"Eating with us?" Lewis Burton asked.

"Sorry," Whiteford answered with an airy wave of his hand. "Tom Marchant is supposed to meet me here at nine and buy me my food."

There was a hurricane of mirth.

"Where're you going, Nedick's?" Lester Scott wanted to know.

"I—"

Sam Whiteford started, and then stopped, because everybody at the bar was looking toward the door. Whiteford set down his drink and looked in the general direction.

Tom Marchant was standing by the hat-check booth, disposing of his topcoat and hat. Behind him stood a gangly, outsize boned individual who appeared to be at least eight feet tall. Later measurements proved that Atom-Bomb Burns was only six-three, but, in the low-ceilinged entrance to Leone's, he looked bigger.

As the group at the bar stared, Tom took his check and that of the giant behind him, with the casual air of one to whom the business of checking one's wraps really belonged to one's servants. He surveyed the startled line at the bar, found Sam, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Sammy pal," he said. "I got a table reserved. Finished with your drink?"

The giant infiltrated into the background as the men at the bar gawked at him. It was not that he was so tall; it was that he apparently had been put together by a celestial welder who had taken a night out—the night before he'd gone to work on this specimen.

His shoulders weren't right. One was noticeably lower than the other. He had a long torso, with short legs. He had hands that would make two of the ordinary size and were half again as big as the king-size that some boxers and baseball players owned.

"Finished your drink, huh?" Tom said. "Good. Let's get over to our table."

At Tom's beckoning gesture, the big man came out of the shadows, and the line at the bar continued to gape. Atop all the crazy framework of the angular body was a face that belonged to a college freshman. A boy's face, with round cheeks and clear, candid eyes. The ensemble was one that could have been achieved by an artisan who had taken the body of one of Boris Karloff's worst movie characters and had topped it off with the face of a male Conover model.

The eyes of the men at the bar followed Sam out into the dining room. They were fixed on the Goliath that followed Whiteford and there was a silence until somebody said, quietly:

"Let's go over to the Rialto, where they show those horror movies, and get back to normal."

CHAPTER II

Burns Demonstrates

WHEN they were seated at the table, Sam Whiteford concentrated on his shrimp cocktail until Marchant made the introduction.

"Sammy pal," Marchant said, "I want you should know Atom-Bomb Burns, the guy that's gonna revolutionize rasslin' in this country. This here is Sammy Whiteford, the sports editor of the *Star-Scimitar,* Atom-Bomb. One of my best friends."

Whiteford grunted something in acknowledgment. The big wrestler across the table rose and solemnly extended his huge paw. Sam reached for it and saw it swallowed in a massive grip.

"Mighty proud to know you, Mr. Whiteford," Burns said. "We get your column in our paper, back home, and I sure like to read it."

"What's your home town?" Whiteford asked. Anything, he thought, to get this freak to sit down.

"Buggy Whip, New Mexico," the big man said. "Ever hear of it?"

"I don't think so," Sam said. "Uh—don't stand up on my account."

The big man backed toward his chair. Sam was about to shout a warning, but before he could utter a sound Atom-Bomb Burns had backed into an adjoining table and—somehow—lifted the thing, with its contents, onto the lap of the burly individual who was seated there. Whiteford saw a bowl of stuff that looked like clam chowder rise in the air and drop into the lap of the burly man who promptly emitted a howl of mingled pain and rage.

"Atom-Bomb" Burns, his baby face bright pink, moved into the wreckage as waiters converged from every part of the room. The wrestler righted the table and was making ineffectual attempts to clean up the broken dishes when the burly man, dripping soup, swung at him with insane fury.

The blow caught the tall man behind the ear and he went forward on his hands and knees. Involuntarily uttering a cry of protest, Whiteford got to his feet. Tom Marchant was in front of him, dabbing at the soup-drenched man with ludicrous blows. The man whose table had been upset made a backhanded sweep that caught Marchant across the face. The manager went reeling into Whiteford. Both men staggered back, carrying their own table with them as they fell.

Right then that Atom-Bomb Burns intervened.

"Look, Mister," he said, in an even voice. "I ain't mad at nobody, but you had no call to hit me. You had no call to hit my manager, neither. It was an accident, and I'm sorry."

"You—" said the thick-set individual, and swung at the wrestler again.

"Touch him!" Tom Marchant ordered, poking his head from beneath the tablecloth that had draped itself over his head. "Touch him, Atom!"

Hesitantly, the tall man reached out one of his ape-like arms and tapped the other man's shoulder. There was a blinding flash, similar to that of a photographer's bulb, and a crackling snap.

When Sam Whiteford stopped blinking, he saw the outraged diner on his back, some five feet away from the place where he had been standing when he had been touched. The burly man, obviously, was in no mood for more combat. Not that he had been injured, so far as Sam could see. Instead, he appeared bewildered, unsure, as he struggled to his feet. His face wore the expression of one who had been caught in the vortex of an Arkansas twister and, somehow, had managed to live through it.

He gave one glance to Atom-Bomb Burns and then, without another word, slunk toward the hat check booth.

"What did I tell ya?" Tom Marchant asked Sam. "He can do that any time."

Sam Whiteford shook his head and looked around him. Yes, it was still Leone's, with its familiar decorations. The waiters, poised momentarily by the shock of the happenings, resumed operations, advancing to right the upset tables and clear away the debris. A voice spoke into Sam Whiteford's ear.

"Mr. Whiteford, do you mind leaving a little early tonight, with your friends. You see, we're very crowded."

"Okay, Joe," Whiteford replied. "We're leaving right away. I'm sorry this occurred."

"That's perfectly all right, Mr. Whiteford. But—but what happened? What was that light, like a blown fuze? And how did Mr. Hobbs get thrown so far? I was watching and—well, the light blinded me, perhaps, but it looked to me as though he sort of jumped backward when your friend touched him."

"Stop calling him my friend," Sam said, irritably. "I don't know any more than you do."

HE TURNED to Marchant and the angular wrestler.

"Let's go up to my place," he said. "Never mind dinner. I'm not hungry, all of a sudden."

"But you ain't finished your shrimp," Marchant protested. "And they'll probably charge for it."

"Put it on my bill," Sam Whiteford said, turning to the obsequious figure behind him. "Let's go, Tom."

They went, with the men at the bar staring after them. One of them, after watching the door close behind the trio, turned back and signaled a bartender.

"I only take two, as a rule," he said, earnestly, to the white-coated ministrant. "But after what I saw just take place, I'll break my rule and have three, four—probably half a dozen."

At his own apartment, Whiteford turned and faced the rotund manager and his charge.

"Okay," he demanded. "What gives? What's the gimmick? What's the answer to this nonsense? I know that no man can touch a guy on the shoulder and have the other guy land up on his back, across the room, so there must be an answer. What is it?"

Tom Marchant reached for the bottle that Sam had set out on the coffee table. Deliberately, he poured four inches of prized Bourbon into a glass and administered a light dusting of soda from the siphon.

"Like I told you, Sammy pal," he said. "The guy's got it."

"Got what?" Sam demanded. "Atomic energy, perhaps?"

Marchant sampled the drink and found it good.

"I'm hungry," grumbled the angular giant.

Marchant looked at the baby-faced colossus, hesitated, and then reached into his pocket to drag forth a well-worn dollar-bill.

"There's a hamburger stand a half block down the street," he said. "You get yourself something to eat while I talk to Sammy. Look at the street signs so you won't forget how to come back here."

After receiving detailed instructions on how to reach the corner and how to get back, the tall man took his departure.

"Okay, Tom," Whiteford asked, when the tall man was gone. "What's the story?"

Marchant settled back in his chair, cradling the highball in his hands.

"I knew you'd be interested, Sammy pal," he said. "I knew right away this was a good story for you. You're my best pal on the newspapers and I said to myself you were a right guy."

"Cut it," Sam ordered. "Give me the business."

"It's a long story, Sammy pal, but it starts out when this kid, this Herbert Smith, joins the Navy. Some way, he gets in a special branch which is testing new kinds of electric stuff. Don't ask me what it was, because I don't know. Seems they told the bum to keep his mouth shut about it. Even if the war is over, he won't talk about what he done. But I do know it was somethin' about electrics. They was testin' some kind of machine and they put some guys in a chamber and seen if the electrics worked on them. I got that out of him, but that's all I got."

"Ultra-shortwave, perhaps?" Whiteford suggested.

Marchant shrugged.

"Ultra-smultra, what do I know about that stuff?" he returned.

"Go ahead."

"So they have these tests with Smith—I mean Atom-Bomb Burns—as the fall guy. And when they finished the tests—maybe they don't work out so good, I don't know—the kid is ordered out on sea duty. So he goes to Okinawa, and some Jap so-and-so bombs the bejabers outta his destroyer. He don't get hit, but a bomb knocks him right into the radar screen they got aboard and he gets shocked pretty bad, with some burns across his back.

"After the destroyer sinks, he gets picked up by a little boat and that gets bombed and he lands in the radio room of this boat—an L. S. T. or somethin'—and he lays there a couple of hours, in the middle of a lotta tubes and coils and stuff, before they finally get around to pickin' him up. He ain't got a scratch, understand, but he's pretty well beat

up by the con—con—"

"Concussion," Whiteford supplied. "So what happened next?"

"Well, the Navy figures he's had enough for awhile, so they ship him back to the States," said Marchant. "He gets a medical discharge on account of his nerves are all shot and when the doc puts one of them things on his chest, all he can hear is the voice of Tokyo Rose broadcastin' from Japan, probably.

"He gets his discharge and he heads for home. This was in August, forty-five. He lives in a place in New Mexico that you and me wouldn't even know he was passin' through, probably, but to him, I expect, it's a big thing."

THE sports editor nodded. He made a gesture of agreement.

"Yeah, I know," Whiteford admitted. "I was born in a little town in Connecticut that had 'Welcome' and 'Goodby, Call Again' on the same road sign."

"Well, anyway, he gets back to his home town and there's nobody there," Tom Marchant continued. "The house he used to live in is empty and there's nobody on the street and the cross-roads store is all vacant, not even a can of beans on the shelves. Then he remembers a sign he saw when he was walkin' out to this place, rather than wait for a bus. The sign says something about danger, and it bein' restricted territory and nobody allowed without a pass and all that stuff, but he didn't pay it much mind, seein' as how the Army and Navy was always testin' their big guns in that neighborhood and he knew how to keep out of the way."

"But why wasn't he stopped?" Whiteford put in. "I mean, if a place was restricted, there must have been some guards around."

Tom Marchant nodded and reached for the Bourbon again. He poured his drink and went through the formality of tilting the soda bottle over his glass before he replied.

"Sure there was guards," he said. "But the way I get it is that the system they had was that when somebody tried to get in that part of the country, the guard at the gate had to call somebody at Buggy Whip, the town Herbert lived in. He wanted to surprise his folks, see? He didn't want everybody in his home town to know he was comin' home, so he sneaked in. He been huntin' that territory all his life, he told me, so he found a place where he could get under the wire and he just marched right on in. Then, when he found the place deserted, he—"

Marchant stopped as the front door opened and Atom-Bomb Burns walked in, a huge, bulging paper sack under one arm.

"Figured you'd be hungry, too, so I got some hamburgers," he announced. "Some have got pickle and some have got relish."

He deposited the bag on an end table and blundered over to the divan beside Marchant.

"We were just talkin' about the time you went home," Marchant said. "The time you found your town deserted."

"That sure was something," the wrestler said, shaking his head dolorously. "I sure got the heeby-jeebies when I walked into that town and found out everybody had left."

"Tell Sammy about it," Tom suggested.

The angular man got up from the divan and walked to the paper bag on the end table. He plucked a hamburger from the sack's confines and bit off a large section.

"Well, sir, it was a shock," he said. "I was plumb mystified. Didn't seem to me that it would be natural for a whole town to pick up and leave, like that. Then I began thinkin' about that sign I saw, when I was comin' in. Then I recalled it wasn't like most of the signs they had been puttin' up. This one had red letters, I remembered. Somethin' about experiments."

He paused to take another bite at the hamburger. That was the end of that tidbit.

"So I looked around, and I saw somethin' out on the desert," Atom-Bomb Burns continued, reaching into the sack. "It looked like an oil well, sort of. Well, I thought to myself, that this was the first time I ever heard of drillers comin' out in the desert, but I saw a lot of funny things in the Navy and maybe they discovered oil near Buggy Whip. That's what I thought, at first."

He examined the hamburger his big hand had brought forth and found it to his liking.

"Rather have relish," he explained. "Pickles make my mouth crowd in on my tongue."

"But what happened?" Whiteford asked.

Atom-Bomb Burns paused to chew the half hamburger he had taken in his first gulp.

"Well, sir, I felt right tired, havin' walked all that way," he said, swallowing mightily. "So I curled up on the floor and went to sleep.

"Then, late at night, I woke up and I was hungry. I went into the kitchen, but there wasn't anything there. I was right discomforted until I remembered the cold cellar Ma had. It was out behind the house and Paw, when he was livin', had dug it deep. You see, in New Mexico—the part I live in—it gets pretty hot sometimes and, unless you've got an ice-makin' machine, which we didn't, it's hard to keep things from spoilin'. But Paw, he dug this cold cellar so deep you could keep stuff down there as long as you wanted to. Guess he'd have hit water with another couple of feet. Ma, she used to keep her vegetables and preserves down there and I figured I probably could find somethin' to eat in that cold cellar."

HE FINISHED his hamburger and automatically reached for another.

"I don't know what time it was I woke up hungry, but it must have been early morning," he said. "Anyway, I hadn't any more than hit the bottom of the ladder when something darned strange happened."

"What happened?" Whiteford demanded.

"Why, it was the biggest commotion you can imagine," the tall man with the hamburger explained. "I was down maybe forty feet underground and I thought at first it was an earthquake. The floor under me sort of jumped around and I guess I must have blacked out for awhile. When I came to, the first thing I noticed was that the trap door to the cold cellar had disappeared. When I went back up the ladder, I saw that the hinges of the trap door were all crinkled up like paper.

"The house was gone, the barn was gone—everything was gone. There was a red glare off to the south where that thing I thought was an oil derrick had been, and that was the only sign of life, if you can call it that. And when I stepped out on the ground, it was like walkin' on pieces of glass. All around me, the stuff was. It was funny, me slippin' and slidin' over that stuff, tryin' to find the house and the barn and even the town, later, and none of 'em were there."

Whiteford struggled to keep his emotions in check.

"You mean—you mean you're—you mean that you went through the first experimental blast of the atom bomb, and lived?" he asked.

Tom Marchant leaned over and tapped the sports editor on the knee.

"Like I told you, Sammy pal," he said. "And what's more, he's got some atom bomb in him!"

"No!" Whiteford ejaculated. "I'll believe all the rest of the story but that's too much!"

"You saw what happened to the cluck in the restaurant, didn't you?" Marchant asked. "How do you explain that, if this bum—this boy—ain't got some of this here atomic energy in him?"

"That—he must have tripped over an electric wire," Sam said, uneasily. "There must be some explanation of it."

Marchant heaved a sigh and looked at the dry bottom of his glass.

"I guess we got to give Sammy a demonstration," he said to the tall man standing beside the sack of hamburgers. "Suppose you give Sam the gimmick, Herbert. Maybe that'll convince him."

Smith, his mouth full of food, grinned and approached the sports editor, his hand extended. "It don't hurt," he said, around his hamburger. "All the fellows I've tried it on said it didn't hurt. They said they just felt a little dizzy for awhile."

Marchant nodded to the wrestler. "Show him, Atom!"

CHAPTER III

Ring Sensation

SAM WHITEFORD flinched away from the wrestler's hand and then caught himself. If this man, he reasoned, actually did have some kind of mysterious energy that could disable another by a simple touch, it would make a column. And Sam Whiteford was a newspaperman who would paddle a canoe between Scylla and Charybdis to get material for a column.

"Okay," he said, with a hint of uncertainty in his voice. "Give me the whammy."

The tall man tapped his shoulder. Nothing happened.

"That's the way I'd touch you ordinarily," Atom-Bomb Burns explained. "Now, when I hold my left hand by my side, like this, and hold my breath, it happens."

He pressed his left hand against his side and inhaled deeply. He reached forward again and touched Sam's shoulder. Then, everything happened, all at once.

There was a blinding flash of light and Whiteford saw the walls of the living room spin in a dizzy whirl. He seemed to be floating through space and then he was plummeting downward, into darkness. Just as he was about to yell, in his fear at the sickening drop, the scene cleared and he found himself back in the deep chair in which he had been sitting. He blinked at Tom and the angular wrestler standing in front of him.

"See what I mean?" Marchant asked. "Do you still think it's a fake?"

Whiteford pulled himself up out of his chair, felt himself carefully and found that all his arms and legs were in their proper place.

"Tom, all the years I've been in this business, this is the first time a wrestling manager has ever convinced me," he said. "The column is yours. When does this walking powerhouse wrestle?"

"Tuesday night," Marchant said, happily. "In Trenton. And we come to Ridgewood Grove Thursday. I want you should be there, Sammy pal, and give us a little write-up, maybe."

"This guy should be written up in the *Scientific American* or the *Medical Journal,*" Whiteford murmured.

"Them high-brow papers," Tom Marchant scoffed. "What kind of circulation have they got?"

Whiteford made the trip to Trenton on the following Tuesday. His column, that day carried a small item which said only:

Lovers of the quote sport unquote of wrestling might do well to see the pull and push game's newest sensation. Atom-Bomb Burns, in his big time debut tonight in Trenton. Take it from this scrivener, the boy's terrific, in an unusual way.

That was the same day that Winchell's column said:

Just what happened at Leone's the other night when a certain member of the gambling gentry tried to play ring-around-the-rosie with a tall, dark and handsome wrestler? They say they're still sweeping up the pieces.

And Joe Williams' column said:

What are the newspaper boys drinking at Leone's these days which would make them tell stories about somebody throwing lightning bolts from his fingertips?

The Trenton arena held only a few people when Whiteford found his way to his seat in the press row. It was, in the vernacular of the ring, a "light bill crowd", meaning that the paid admissions would just barely pay for the lights. The man from Trenton's morning paper glanced up in surprise as Sam Whiteford moved past him to his place.

"What in the world are you doing here?" he asked. "I never knew you covered any wrestling shows, much less the second-rate stuff that they're putting on here tonight."

"Just out for the air," Whiteford said. "And between the two of us, you'd better get ready to make over your page to feature this Atom-Bomb Burns. Unless I'm very wrong, you'll have a story."

"Atom-Bomb Burns?" the Trenton man asked. "What's so remarkable about him?"

"If I told you," Whiteford said, "you wouldn't believe me."

The two lard tubs who were grunting, grimacing and groaning, finished their act in the ring above Whiteford and the referee announced the verdict. There was the usual by-play of the loser threatening to annihilate the referee and being torn away by his handlers as the prop cop jumped into the ring. The meager crowd of spectators applauded apathetically.

ATOM-BOMB BURNS and Tom Marchant stepped into the ring at about the same time that the other man stooped through the ropes. The other man, in this case, was an individual who went under the name of "Killer" Coyle. He was a veteran and Whiteford could remember when he had wrestled under such cognomens as "Sudden Death" Sutton, "The Purple Mask," "The Sultan" and "The Black Widow's Husband."

Actually, Sam knew, his name was Roger Wheatly and he was very proud of his three kids in East Orange and the delicatessen shop he owned in Rahway. Being a wrestling villain had paid him a fair amount of money down through the years and now, although he was past the fifty mark, he still enjoyed picking up a few stray dollars appearing in wrestling shows, although they did not have too much money to offer their contestants.

To the uninitiated, Killer Coyle looked like something out of a particularly bad nightmare. He wore a full, black beard which matched the matting on his chest, and his features were cast in a professional leer that he donned in the dressing room, with his tights. His broken nose, his cauliflower ears and his demoniacal grin—he always removed his upper plate before wrestling and the absence of the manufactured molars gave

him the appearance of being fanged—were things which added up to a visage which, in the heyday of wrestling, had been compared favorably to that all-time high in maladjusted faces, "The Angel."

"That skinny kid hasn't got a chance, unless the fix is in," said the Trenton man.

"I don't know about the fix, but the skinny kid has got a chance," Whiteford said.

The referee called the two men to the center of the ring and gave his instructions. Killer Coyle spent the time, during the referee's recital, feeling Atom-Bomb's muscle and leering out at the crowd. The disparagement in weight and bulk was almost ridiculous. Tom Marchant's man resembled a fence rail, where the other man looked like a brick wall. The crowd hooted and jeered when the announcer introduced Atom-Bomb Burns to the crowd.

"Send him back to New Mexico and fatten him up," cried some wit in the balcony.

"Take it easy, Killer," another customer yelled. "You don't want no manslaughter rap to beat."

The bell rang and the two men came to the center of the ring again. The Killer was crouched in his familiar pose, working his face into odd positions, when Atom-Bomb Burns walked in and put his hand on the other man's shoulder.

There was a flare and then Killer Coyle was across the ring and on his back, with his legs making feeble kicking motions. Atom-Bomb walked across the square of canvas and pinned Coyle's shoulders to the mat. The referee made the count and, with a sweeping gesture, pointed at Burns as the winner.

Sam Whiteford got up from his chair at the ringside and threw his topcoat over his arm.

"I told you the kid had something," he reminded the man from the Trenton sheet.

"B—but what was it?" the other man asked. "I know it can't be true but I'll swear that Coyle just went backward, across the ring after that skinny guy touched him."

"Uh-huh," Whiteford agreed. "That's probably just what occurred."

"But that's impossible!"

"Is it?" Sam returned. "You saw it with your own eyes."

"I saw it but I still don't believe it," said the Trenton writer, unhappily.

Later, in the dressing room, Sam Whiteford saw Tom Marchant and his wrestler. Marchant was wearing his widest grin.

"Great, wasn't it, Sammy pal?" he asked. "You watched what my boy did to that big bum, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Whiteford admitted. "But I still think there's some kind of a gimmick mixed up in this. Did you have Coyle framed to do a nose dive, or was this really on the legit?"

"I don't make deals, Mr. Whiteford," Atom-Bomb Burns said, in an aggrieved voice. "I don't have to."

"Of course not," Tom Marchant said. "Any deals that are made, they'll have to come shopping at our counter."

Whiteford draped his elongated shape in the rickety chair that sat against the wall and tilted his hat back on his head as he reached for his pipe.

"Did you ever consider what this—this strange power your boy owns might mean?" he asked Marchant. "I don't see any reason why he shouldn't win the heavyweight title. All he'd have to do is touch the other man in the ring and it would be classed as a knockout. Wrestling is pretty small potatoes, compared with the purses you could get in the fight racket."

THE rotund little manager shook his head sadly.

"Don't think we ain't gone into that, Sammy pal," he said. "But this here atomic energy is funny business. We find out a long time ago that it don't work when Herbert, here, is wearing gloves. We try it out in St. Louis and Herbert, he gets knocked kickin' in the first round."

Atom-Bomb Burns rubbed his jaw reflectively.

"Hurt, too," he said, reminiscently. "Fellow like to tore my head off."

"So we had to take rassling," Tom added. "It's about the only bare-handed racket that Herbert can use his stuff in. But when he gets to be champeen in all the classes, after puttin' the whammy on them bums that hold the titles, maybe we can clean up a little dough."

On the train back to the city, Sam Whiteford pondered over the phenomenon he had encountered. It did not make sense, but there it was. This man, Herbert Smith, had somehow become infused with atomic energy, probably through a combination of the mysterious Navy experiments, his being blown into a radar screen, and later being thrown into a tangle of radio tubes, when the other

ship he was on was bombed, and, most of all, being in what must have been the center of the area in which the first atom bomb test was held, in New Mexico. So that now, by the simple expedient of pressing his left hand against his side, holding his breath and reaching out to touch someone, he could paralyze the other person.

That would make a swell column, he told himself, but who was going to believe it? Certainly he wouldn't believe it himself, if he read it in anybody else's column.

That was the trouble, he thought. A man gets the story of the century and it's too impossible to print. Sam Whiteford contented himself with a brief squib which merely stated:

Keep an eye on Atom-Bomb Burns, who won his first big-time go in the wrestling game last night at Trenton. This scribe seldom mentions wrestling, but this boy is somebody to watch. And if I were a betting man, I'd lay odds of ten to one that nobody stays in the ring with him over a couple of minutes.

The reaction was positive and immediate. Whiteford was flooded with letters from all the wrestling champions within mailing distance. Jeemy Spondos wrote to challenge Burns to a one-fall match, the winner to take possession of the "diamond belt which has got real diamonds not paste like that faker from Toledo wears". Man Mountain Keene sent a wire, promising to "tear this bum apart in a couple of minutes." Young hopefuls from the hinterlands sent snapshots, exhibiting themselves in leopard-skin breech-clouts, with muscles flexed.

Ridgewood Grove was jammed, that Thursday night, with most of the big-name sports writers in place along the press row. Sam Whiteford's item about Atom-Bomb Burns had brought out an audience that eclipsed previous gate receipt records for wrestling shows at the arena.

"You got a chunk of this boy?" somebody called to Whiteford as he took his seat.

"I wish I had," Whiteford answered. "Wait till you see him."

They did not have long to wait. Atom-Bomb Burns was scheduled for the second bout, against a second-rate wrestler named Jeremiah Hoxey.

Jeremiah earned his following by the means of simulating the act of biting his opponents' ears, when he had them on the mat. The crowd found great delight in watching Jeremiah gnaw on his victims' ears, even though they knew the business was not genuine.

The bout was a repetition of the Trenton affair. Jeremiah came out of his corner, lurching like a bear that had had too many beers, and Atom-Bomb Burns reached over and tapped him on the shoulder. There was the glimmer of light and Jeremiah Hoxey went over backwards. Burns pinned his shoulders to the mat and waited for the referee to count ten.

"See what I mean?" Sam Whiteford asked the men around him.

"But, listen—hey, wait! How does he do it?"

CHAPTER IV

Secret of the Atom

DESPITE protests, Sam Whiteford left the chorus of voices behind him as he departed from the press row. Back at his office, he typed the column that had to do with the new wrestling sensation who only touched a man to win his bouts.

"Sammy pal, we got a bout fixed with the champeen," Tom Marchant said the next day. "The local champeen, that is. I want you should write it up good. so we can get a big crowd. I'm takin' a percentage of the gate, instead of a guarantee."

"You'd better take all you can get, because your meal ticket is going to be just another bum in a few days," Whiteford counseled.

"What do you mean?" Tom demanded.

"I mean he's wearing out," Whiteford explained. "I've been reading up on this atomic energy stuff and I've found out that the power doesn't last forever. Near Hiroshima there were hens which didn't lay eggs for six months or more. But they're back at the old business now and the roosters that lost their combs in that blast are growing them back.

"Remember the big flash of light that happened at Leone's, when your boy touched that heel that wanted to make trouble? At Trenton, the first night I saw Burns wrestle, that flash was tamed down to a glare. And last night, at Ridgewood, it wasn't more than a flicker. I hate to say it, but your boy is losing his supernatural stuff. You'd better match him up with the champ as soon as you can, before he fizzles out."

Tom Marchant regarded the cigar in his hand and sighed gustily.

"So you seen it, too," he said. "I was hopin' nobody'd notice it until we got a couple of kopeks together. Yeah, the bum is fadin' away like Nellie Gray but maybe—maybe we can recharge him, Sammy pal"

"Recharge him? How?"

"I got some pals in politics," Marchant said, earnestly. "Maybe I can fix it so Atom-Bomb Burns goes out in the Pacific, where they're gonna sink all them ships with an A-bomb. Maybe we can arrange it so he digs a pit on one of them islands and lets them rays soak into him and—"

"Stop dreaming," Whiteford interrupted, rudely. "You know it was just a happy combination of all the things he went through that made him the way he is. And you know you can't get him back the way he was, once he's lost it."

"Yeah," said Tom, sadly. "But I can dream, can't I?"

Word of Atom-Bomb Burns had gotten around, so that the arena in which he met the current champion was crowded to the rafters. Marchant led his wrestler into the ring and over to a place just above where Sam Whiteford was sitting. The angular performer leaned over the ropes, his round face anxious.

"You got a bet on the bout, Mr. Whiteford?" he asked.

"Me, I don't bet on fights, much less wrestling bouts," Whiteford replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I don't feel so good, Mr. Whiteford," the wrestler explained. "I'm not sure whether the old whammy still works, or not."

"Of course it still works," Marchant said, expansively. "You're just a little nervous about meetin' the champ, is all. You can take him, Atom boy, like you been takin' all the other chumps you meet up with. Just give 'em the old magoo. Just tap 'em on the shoulder and it'll be all over."

"Well, maybe," the tall wrestler said, uncertainly. "But I hope none of my friends are betting on me tonight."

Tom Marchant walked his wrestler over to his corner as the champion entered the ring. The current top man in the wrestling business in those parts was a clean-limbed boy who got his sun tan at one of the city's Turkish baths. There were rumors that he had his yellow hair rinsed and curled at one of the leading beauty shops, but nobody had been able to prove it.

Regardless of all that, he still earned the title under which he wrestled—"The Greek God." He was a beautiful animal, bulging with muscles.

The referee called the two men to the center of the ring and gave them their instructions. The Greek God preened himself under the glare of the overhead lights as the third man in the ring told him what to do under certain circumstances.

Sam Whiteford watched the boy from New Mexico and found nothing to his liking in what he glimpsed. Atom-Bomb Burns was clearly ill at ease, shifting from one foot to the other as the referee recited his instructions. As Whiteford watched, Tom Marchant's wrestler put his left hand to his side and held his breath. Then he looked down at the mat and shook his head.

THE whammy, then, could not be working, Sam Whiteford told himself.

The two wrestlers went back to their corners and, when the bell rang, came out toward the middle of the ring. The Greek God moved in lithely, limbering up his massive shoulders with a shrugging motion. Atom-Bomb Burns stalked in, the picture of a scarecrow unanchored. When he got within touching distance of the champion, he pressed his left hand to his side, held his breath and touched the title-holder.

There was a dull spark and The Greek God found himself across the ring on his back. Shaking his head, he fought his way to his feet and charged at the skinny man across the ring. Again, that hand touched him and, again, there was a brief light. And, again, The Greek God discovered that he was down.

As the crowd churned up a noisy melody, the champion got to his feet again and began circling the ring cautiously.

"Oh-oh," Sam said, silently. "He's getting up awfully soon. I think Herbert Smith's cake is baked right here."

The Greek God moved in. Atom-Bomb Burns touched him and there was the snap of a spark as the champion moved away, in staggering backward steps. The champ moved in again and again the spark crackled. This time, The Greek God did not retreat. He kept boring in until he had his thick arms around the middle of Atom-Bomb Burns.

"That's all, brother," Sam Whiteford murmured, as he reached for his hat. "It was good while it lasted, anyway."

He was half way out of his seat when he saw something that made him sink back into place. The Greek God was trying to apply a chancery hold on the struggling Burns. And Atom-Bomb was pressing his finger furiously into the other man's shoulder. It appeared to be no contest, for a moment, as Atom-Bomb Burns' gimmick refused to work.

Then, suddenly, The Greek God went limp.

If there had been a fix in, Sam Whiteford could have understood the abrupt ending of the bout. But, as far as he knew, no fix was in and when he looked around the arena, there was nothing more significant than a man raising a shade to let the light of the pale, lemon-yellow moon come through.

He looked back at the ring in time to see the referee count ten over the prostrate champion, with Atom-Bomb Burns kneeling over him. The Greek God looked as though he had just been hit by a truck. He lay there, on the mat, gulping deep breaths. As his handlers took him to his corner, he wagged his head steadily, as though to clear it of thoughts that did not belong to him.

"What happened?" Sam Whiteford asked. "It looked as though you were beat for awhile. Then, all of a sudden, you put the whammy on him. Just what took place?"

"Like I told you, Sammy pal," Tom Marchant said. "This boy is a good rassler, even without the whammy."

Smith looked up from the involved job of stripping off the long, black tights. He shook his head.

"I didn't have a thing, at first," he said. "And then I looked up and saw the moon shinin' through the window, and it was like a letter from home. I got the old strength back where I needed it, and—well, you saw what happened."

"You mean—you mean the moon—" Sam Whiteford gasped.

"You read about them makin' contact with the moon by radar," Tom Marchant prompted. "I guess they fixed up my boy, Atom-Bomb, at the same time, maybe."

"I quit," Sam Whiteford announced. "Maybe I fell for that stuff about your boy having atomic energy in his system, but when it comes down to him getting energy from the moon—"

He slammed the door as he walked out. After his footsteps died away, there was a silence.

"Okay," Tom Marchant said, finally, in a dismal voice. "I guess the party's over."

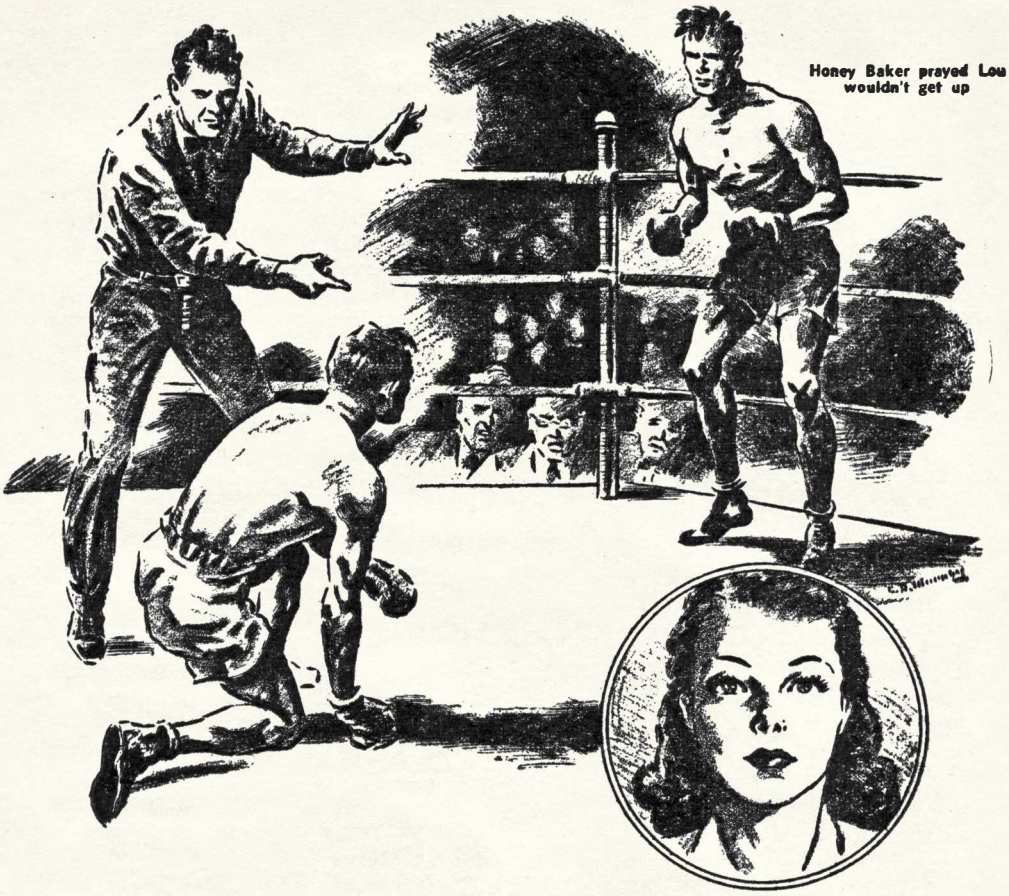
He watched while Atom-Bomb Burns did things with straps and buckles until he was able to strip a long sheath of flesh-colored rubber from his right arm. Beneath the remarkably human-looking covering was a tangle of wires and a small black box which obviously contained batteries, was cunningly fixed in the palm of the oversized hand.

Tom Marchant accepted the paraphernalia as Burns detached it from his body. He looked down at it mournfully.

"We had a good thing," he said. "Who woulda thought Sammy could notice when the old batteries were runnin' low? I thought he'd go for the moon business, but I guess not."

He shrugged his broad, fat shoulders expressively.

"So it didn't work," he said. "Okay, wait here till I pay off The Greek God, like I paid off Killer Coyle and the other guys. And you might be lookin' up the next train to Buggy Whip, New Mexico, because you're takin' it."



Honey Baker prayed Lou wouldn't get up

A PROMISE TO A DAME

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Jimmy Nagle Thinks He Has Nothing to Fight For—But a Girl and a Dead Man Give Him a Reason That Starts Him Swinging!

JIMMY NAGLE got off the bus at a cold and windy corner in Bridgefield and crossed the street to a cheap lunchroom. In the window, close to alleged hamburgers sizzling on a grill, was a sign saying:

FRIDAY, JAN. 14, 1944
Bridgefield Arena
Main Event—Ten Rounds
LEE MANGUM vs. WILLIE SEPP
Four Prelims.

He went in and asked for coffee and also how he should go about getting himself a fight. A customer too old and too fat for the army looked up from his plate.

"Most fighters don't have to look far, nowadays," he said meaningly. "Real fighters."

Jimmy Nagle shoved his hand into his pocket and brought it out again, doubled into a big fist. Eyes stormy, he thrust the fist under the fat boy's nose and quickly opened it.

"Take a look, you bum." A little metal button was sticking to the palm. "It was not for perfect attendance at choir practice. It says I spent eleven months in the army be-

fore an anti-aircraft gun bit the ends off three fingers. I've been told by the doctors to practice more with my left, and I should begin on you—right now."

The man's fat face went a little white.

"Sorry, Kid," he said hurriedly. "Anybody can make mistakes. A doity break gettin' hurt before you killed yourself some Japs."

Jimmy Nagle grinned. "Yeah, I wanted to kill a hundred."

He wanted to tell them he had gotten the really tough break, though, when the army had grabbed him, just when he'd been lining up some important fights. Sure, the war was a very important fight too, but there were plenty of other guys to take care of it—guys who had loved ones who cared whether they came back or not. As for fighting for freedom, he had had only about nine years of freedom anyway. He had had it only since the night he had scaled the walls of a certain institution back East.

War was a cold-blooded business—like Wall Street and the boxfighting racket. To get along in any of them you had to figure the angles. But he should waste his good breath telling that to these bums!

He asked the way to a second rate hotel, paid his tariff and went out.

A few minutes later he walked up a shoddy flight of stairs to a trap of a lobby where a man sat behind a counter reading a comic magazine.

Rooms, the shabby boniface told him, were a buck a day, or six by the week.

Jimmy Nagle took one for the next seven days and followed the clerk up another flight of stairs. The cubicle was not too fancy, but better than the army. It had just enough clearance for a fair-sized welterweight, a bed and a trunk. He was glad he didn't own a trunk. The radiator hissed steam and sounded and felt good, for his feet were cold and that ear of his that was a little tinny was tingling as if a sweet right hook had reached it.

When he had warmed up and washed, he sat down on the bed and banged his left fist into the palm of his injured right.

"Yeah," he said. "I got to use the left more." And he thought of Duke Maslin nine hundred miles away.

Duke always used to tell him to use that left more. Duke was quite a manipulator of fighters, and he would have been glad to have welcomed Kayo Nagle back if he had brought all his fingers with him. Trouble with Duke was he was timid. He couldn't stand seeing one of his meatballs take too much. So Duke would not let Jimmy Nagle work with a bad hand.

But there was a manager Jimmy could sell himself to.

JIMMY hummed a popular tune. It fit the fight racket as well as the shortage of eligible males. "They are either too young or too old."

Out here in Bridgefield were a couple of big war plants. There was also a man who got a fat share of those big, war-pay envelopes without as much as taking off his boiled shirt or getting up a sweat. He did it by tossing meatballs into a ring once a week and letting them knock each other's brains out. Rumor had it that oftentimes this Tully Blonder could tell you who was going to win or lose, and would back his judgment with folding money that he seldom if ever lost.

Jimmy Nagle looked up Tully Blonder. The man had his office in the Hymer Building. The connoisseur of cauliflower was not a prepossessing looking 4F. He had a big bony head with hardly any hair left on it, and he also had a plat eye that was unpleasant to see. Blonder was very thin and one of his legs was wound around the other like a vine, as he lolled in his chair.

"Mr. Blonder?"

"The same. I only got a few minutes so make it fast, Mac. Would you be a meatball?"

"I wouldn't," Jimmy Nagle said. "I am a fighter, but if I was a meatball I happen to know they are in demand." On the way from the hotel he had indulged in some swift thinking. Out here he could find out how far he was going in the business without using his right name. The name he picked just came to him. It sounded nice. "Honey Baker is the name. I beat some good fighters around New York."

"You should of stayed there, then," Blondder said, his one good eye taking a swift inventory of the kind of flesh in which he dealt. "It's bigger time."

"I have my reasons," Jimmy said. "You run fights here and I am a fighter, so we could do business."

"Maybe. You scale about one forty-five, Kid?"

"Almost on the nose, Mr. Blonder. You know your business." He showed the promoter his right hand. "But don't let that worry you," he said quickly. "It won't fire a gun, but it can still explode against a bum's whiskers."

Tully Blonder watched him open and close the fist several times. He suddenly nodded his head.

"I'll take your word for that for now," he said. "We aren't so fussy here. I can use you in a six rounder Friday night. It pays seventy-five if you win, Baker. I will know then if you are just a bum. Where you stayin'?"

He told Blonder. He asked him could he

get a small advance seeing that he only had four bucks with which to eat and train for the next three days. Sure, when the army turned him loose with a C.D.D. they had given him some dough, but what did guys like Blonder know about this business of readjustment?

Blonder shook his head.

"I could not afford to hire a special cop to see you didn't skip town," he said. "I should hand out dough to every stumblebum that stops over here!"

"Skip it," Jimmy said. "I'll build myself up on coffee cake and then knock the ears of this punk of yours whoever he may be. Afterwards we will talk things over, Blonder."

"Maybe." Blonder smiled a slow, easy smile. "You are fighting a good boy."

MAYBE this Tully Blonder wasn't so smart. The boy, Jimmy Nagle found out after the first round, was not very good. He had had his nose squished in somewhere along the way, and there were too many little white crescents and V's on his face.

In his corner Jimmy Nagle leaned back and grinned. The fair-sized crowd had given him the old razzmatazz when he had been introduced as Honey Baker, but now they were asking him to murder this Kid Sarron. Fight crowds were the same everywhere.

He went out at the bell and stabbed Sarron three times with his left and danced away. He wished Duke Maslin could see him use that left. Jimmy Nagle could still get the ends of the maimed fingers against the palm and so make a passable right fist, but the knuckles were out of line. He had to remember a hand like that could be broken easily, and to work no higher on Sarron's face than his eyes.

Jimmy took a wild right almost flush and the little birds sang briefly between his ears, but he shook the music out and grinned. He was young and could still go without meat for a while and keep in shape, but he never wanted to see a piece of coffee cake again. He maneuvered the crowd pleaser into a nice shot for a right and let it go. Sarron bounced when he hit deck.

The boy foolishly got up at the count of seven and was a pushover for a left hook that traveled only three or four inches. Sarron's seconds came up into the ring and Honey Baker called it a night.

Jimmy sat in the dressing room afterwards, feeling very nice, his nose trying to ignore the swells hundreds of meatballs had left behind them. Blonder could talk a little business now, for the crowd out there was still howling over the kill he had made.

He dressed quickly and went out to watch the main event and when it was over he guessed he could lick both of the bums in one night. Then again, they might not have been trying.

He went upstairs and got his seventy-five bucks.

"Peanuts, Mister," he said to Tully Blonder. "They liked me out there. Why didn't you hire a nice orchestra for the main event?"

"You licked a bum, Baker," Blonder said. "You have still to prove you ain't one yourself before you get more dough. A week from tonight's your next chance."

"For a hundred and fifty." Jimmy Nagle stared into that plat eye. "I can count a house, Blonder. This dump holds three thousand people and they each paid from a buck-ten up to five-fifty. You shouldn't profiteer in time of war."

"Smart boy," Blonder said. "Okay, it is a hundred and fifty. After that next fight, maybe the hospital will get a C note which will leave you fifty."

"Another good boy?" Honey Baker grinned.

"Get out of here, Baker."

The first thing Honey Baker did was to go and find himself a reasonable facsimile of a steak smothered in onions. When he had finally found it and consumed it, he sat back in his chair and let his right hand close lovingly over the roll in his pocket.

He'd heard just before the army turned him loose that there was more dough in circulation in the country than ever before, and that the smart ones called it inflation. Well, if that was what it was, it felt very good.

Next week he would have twice as much cabbage and after that fight Blonder would have to talk still bigger business. He had the wherewithal with which to keep in shape now. He found his training spot at McCue's gym, not far from the hotel.

The next Monday afternoon at McCue's, he saw the meatball he was to fight. His name was Sailor Burk, although he had never seen an ocean. He was rugged, but slow on his feet, and Honey Baker stopped worrying. Working out himself, he found out that he would have to be careful with his right hand for once when he drove it into the heavy bag he felt a little twinge back of the knuckles.

IT WAS fight night again, and it was Honey Baker and Sailor Burk in the semi-final. It was the fourth frame of the eight rounder, and for the first time in over a year, Jimmy Nagle was feeling some lumps.

They hurt mostly in the neighborhood of his meridian, for he had not as yet boiled all of the surplus lard from there. But he was giving the Sailor some lumps too, and Burk

was floundering around on the canvas as if it were the deck of a corvette in a heavy sea. Some of the Sailor's old cuts were showing bright red; and the mouse under his eye was fattening up and making it hard for him to see.

Honey Baker got the Sailor in the fifth. He moved around the ring fast and had Burk's tongue rolling before the man caught up with him. Then a solid smash to Burk's stomach put him down.

Burk got up at five, and Honey Baker rushed him against the ropes. The Sailor's gloves dropped as if anvils had been tied to them. The ref stepped in then and stopped the slaughter.

The roar of the crowd, as Jimmy Nagle walked to the dressing room, had a definite jingle to it, the jingle of coin of the realm. The roar was jarring loose the strings of Tully Blonder's big money bag whether the sharp-thinking promoter knew it or not.

In the dressing room, a writer waited for Honey Baker.

"You know," he said. "That name of yours is a little familiar. Seems one time I read it—"

"You must be wrong, chum." Jimmy hitched himself up onto the rubbing table. "Maybe some night club dame you knew was called Honey. Hey, Eddie, rip this tape off."

"It was a nice fight," the writer said. "What chance would you have against Lou Gross?"

Jimmy grinned.

"They like him here, I've heard," he said. "He's top man they tell me."

"With a war on, he'll stay up there, Baker. Lot of the best ones have gone to war."

"Maybe I'll knock him off," Jimmy said. "You see I've been to war."

He went up to Tully Blonder's little office again and collected the purse. Tully smiled at him for the first time.

"Up to now I wasn't sure about you, Kid," he said. "You and me can really do business, Baker. But first, you should get a good manager."

"I don't hear you talkin'," Jimmy Nagle said. "Fightin', my friend, is not exactly unpainful, and no percentage bum is going to cut in on my lettuce without taking lumps himself. I'm on my own, Blonder."

Tully regarded the tip of his burning cigar reflectively with his one clear eye. In Bridgefield, they said of Tully that his good points were exclusively his elbows and his knees. He was the sort of operator who would take time out to skin a mole if the market price for the little pelts suited him.

"Okay," he said. "If that's the way you want it, Kid. Take a seat."

Jimmy Nagle slid his tongue around inside his mouth, probing for a sore spot put there by Sailor Burk's chopping right. He waited, but Tully Blonder seemed loath to spread his cards out.

The fighter grinned.

"Go ahead, Tully," he prompted. "What is the angle?"

Blonder considered a while longer.

"This Lou Gross is well liked around here and he hasn't lost a fight," he said finally. "The angle is that he should lose one. It would look bad if he should lose to a meatball, but seein' as how you have knocked over your first two, Baker—"

"He is to go in the tank for me. Is that it?" Honey Baker grinned very wide. "Always I figured a guy was paid to lose and not to win, Tully. This is quite an angle. What do I get?"

Tully kept his good eye off the fighter.

"Five C's, Baker," he said.

"For a fix? That's marbles, Blonder. Think again."

"But that's only part of it, Baker. You get three hundred in advance to make a bet. The odds on Lou Gross should be five-to-one on the night of the fight. Of course, I could get me another boy—"

"You've already got yourself one," Jimmy Nagle said.

Blonder smiled.

"You'll hear from me then, Kid," he said. "I got to talk with the others. Meanwhile, you see that you train and keep in top shape like it was a real hard fight coming up, and don't shoot off your bazoo to the dames about the sables you will soon be buying for them."

"I never mix with dames, Blonder. That all for now?"

"That's all, Baker."

Honey Baker left the office, figuring how much three Cs would bring if the price on Lou Gross would be as good as five-to-two. But he had never been a mathematical genius and he said to heck with it when he got outside.

It would be a lot of dollars any way you looked at it.

THE fix was on five days later, and the fight was coming up a week from Friday night.

Jimmy Nagle emerged from the building housing McCue's gym, and a girl toucehd him on the arm. It stopped him right on his heels.

"Up there," she said. "It's where fighters train, isn't it?"

"It's no beauty parlor, baby," Jimmy said.

"Tell me. You've been up there. Do you know a fighter named Honey Baker?"

He stared at her, his mouth open and taking in the cold wind. He guessed he was

tongue-tied a good two minutes before he spoke.

"Are you kiddin', sister?" he said. "I never saw you before in my whole life, and I happen to be Honey Baker."

"You? Honey Baker? No, there's some mistake. There has to be because—" She stopped speaking, but her lips kept moving strangely.

She looked half-frozen, and not from just the weather. Her coat was threadbare, and had not been made for such a day as this one. Her shoes had been built for long service and not for style. No pin-up, Jimmy Nagle thought. She had one of those silly scarfs pulled tight around her head in lieu of a hat.

"Look," he said. "Look, baby, we got to talk this over. You look like you could use some hot coffee, and there's a joint around the corner."

"Yes, I could," she said, and let him take her arm and lead her.

They went into the lunchroom. There were tables in the back, and she sat down at one, looking smaller than ever. But the room's warmth slowly put dabs of color in her thin cheeks, and she even smiled.

Gee, he thought, what did a guy say to this kind of dame? What was her angle?

"My name is Mary Baker," the girl said when Jimmy Nagle had given his order. "Honey Baker was my brother."

He took that second shock in stride.

"Go on, sister," he said. "What made you think you'd find him here? Go on, baby."

She opened a cheap pocketbook, and rummaged around until she came up with a small newspaper clipping. She gave it to him. He scanned it hurriedly. It said:

OUT-OF-TOWN FIGHT RESULTS
LAST NIGHT

Bridgefield, Ill.—Lee Mangum, 135, Covington, Ky., outpointed Willie Sepp, 136, Joliet, ten rounds; Honey Baker, 144, Atlanta Ga., kayoed Sailor Burk 145½ Racine, Wis., five rounds. . . .

"He was one of the first to go to war," she said. "For six months now he's been missing in action. He was all I had. His real name was Tommy. I always called him Honey. When I saw that in the paper, I took the first bus here. Sometimes a man loses his memory."

"Yeah," he said crumpling the clipping in his fist. "First thing they do is forget their name. What kind of a fighter was he, baby? I mean in the ring."

"One of the best. He would have been a champion. He won the Silver Gloves back home, and his first two professional fights." She smiled a distant smile, and moisture appeared in her brown eyes. "He promised me when he got his first big purse he would buy me a fur coat. He would have, too."

JIMMY NAGLE wondered what was happening to him deep inside. He had never talked with anyone like her before. All the girls he had ever known, and sidestepped, had worn perfume of a kind and used makeup they must have had to remove with a putty knife.

"My real name is Jimmy," he said, and kept staring at her. "I picked the name I use now right out of the air. I must have heard it somewhere some time. So he was a great guy?"

"He was fine and square and clean," she said. "Promise me you'll never do anything but what's right with the name of Honey Baker. He died out there for us. He was only twenty."

He answered quickly, still wary.

"They insure soldiers in this war. On ten grand you could wear mink and eat—"

"They're sending me the money," she broke in, and a fire flamed in her eyes. "But I won't ever use it unless I just have no other choice. It would be too much like—like spending his life!"

All this was crazy. A dame talked that way only in a movie or in a book. He was pretty sure she still had an angle.

"I'll take you to the bus, baby," he said. "You better go back home."

She shook her head. "I can't go back," she said. "Everything there reminds me of him. I'll find a job, and—and thanks so much for everything."

He got up quickly and helped her on with her coat as if he could not get rid of her quickly enough. They went outside into the cold.

"If you need me anytime," he said, "call McCue's. I'll be around for a while."

"You didn't promise me, Jimmy." She waited, looking up at him.

"Promise? Oh, yeah. I'll look out for Honey Baker."

He wasn't kidding. He watched her walk across the street. The wind whipped at her skirt and raised it above her knees. She wasn't too skinny, he thought. Not at all.

Jimmy Nagle went over to Tully Blonder's office forty-eight hours later, and Tully handed him three crisp one-hundred-dollar bills.

"Kid," he said, "if you want me to bet it for you—"

"No, I'd like to handle this myself for a while." Jimmy grinned. "Not that I don't trust you, Tully. But it's nice holding so much moola. When I want to put it on the line, I'll let you know."

Tully's one good eye harbored a dubious glint.

"You understand, Baker, nothin' better go wrong."

"You want I should win," Jimmy said. "I would be a prize jerk to cross a deal like that, Blonder."

HE WENT over to the gym and put in some work, and there he met Lou Gross. Gross' muscles were laid flat against his bones and they rippled under his sweat as he cuffed a colored boy around. He was very fast and had a right hand as dangerous as a bazooka. Gross leaned over the ropes when Jimmy went by.

"It'll be a nice fight, pal," he said.

"Yeah," Jimmy agreed, "very nice." And he continued on over to the pulleys.

But all of his mind was not on his work, and he quit early. After that look at Lou Gross, he was very glad it was a fix, for this Gross certainly did not look like a bum.

He walked the streets. He came to a store and he stopped and looked at the fur coats on display in the big window. They looked very warm and very beautiful.

He was back there again the next afternoon when he should have been on his way to see a certain gentleman whom Tully had mentioned on the phone that morning. Jimmy Nagle knew he must be punchy even to think about it, but he went into the store and asked to look at the coats. There was one that cost three hundred bucks, and the fur was black and crinkly.

When Jimmy Nagle walked out of there he carried that coat in a big box.

He got to the hotel, took the coat out and spread it on the bed. He ran his fingers over the fur that had really cost him over seven hundred dollars—because now he no longer had the three hundred to bet on himself. He looked at himself in the washstand mirror and called himself names he would never take from anybody else.

Okay, he tried to justify the haywire extravagance to himself. You are in a business. When you take somebody else's name to use in that business you've got to pay for it. That's what I'm doing now. After this, that dame won't have a thing to squawk about.

And if he knew Blonder, there would be another fix. The next time out it would be Lou Gross' turn to beat the brains out of Honey Baker.

The fur coat was still in the box at the hotel on the afternoon of the fight. Jimmy Nagle had not heard a word from the girl. An hour before he left for the arena, she called him at the hotel.

"I want to wish you luck, Honey," she said. "I'll be thinking of you all through the fight."

Honey, she'd called him! He felt a weakness in his knees.

"Thanks, baby," he said. "After the fight, I've got to see you."

She told him it would be all right. She was living at the Y.W.C.A., on the west side.

"I've got a present for you, baby," Jimmy Nagle said, and wondered at the excited sound of his own voice.

Afterward, out in the street, his hands shook as he touched a match to a quick smoke. Gee, why the jitters? The fix was on, and he had nothing to worry about.

HONEY BAKER and Lou Gross went through the first round and made it look very good to the packed house. Going back to his corner at the bell, Jimmy Nagle saw the smile that played at the corners of Tully Blonder's mouth, and for the first time he saw Tully as he really was. No patron saint for meatballs. Just a first class rat.

There was a disturbance inside Jimmy Nagle that had not resulted from Lou Gross' punches. Lou had pulled all of those. But the disturbance was caused by the fact that someone was thinking of him. She'd be thinking of him all through the fight, she said. Thinking of Jimmy Nagle.

That freshened Jimmy more than his handler's cursory manipulations. Over there Gross wore a grin too, and Jimmy wished the bell would hurry up and ring so he could smash that grin away.

Honey Baker rushed out at the bell, and the force of his drive put Gross against the ropes. He bumped Gross with a hard left, smashed a solid right into Lou's midsection that made him gasp and hang on.

"These aren't maneuvers, pal," Honey Baker said. "Watch your whiskers, Lou! It's for real!"

"You nuts, Baker?" Gross choked out and fought himself out of the clinch.

He kept away for the next thirty seconds, watching his opponent's eyes. He could read no reassurance in them, and he glanced quickly toward his corner. The mental lapse paid off with a hook from Honey Baker's left hand that rattled his teeth.

Lou Gross bounced off the ropes then and began swinging. His right hand found a target, and the crowd started to roar.

Honey Baker backed away fast, shaking his head to clear the cobwebs. His long left clopped against Lou Gross' nose and against his mouth. But the fighter slid in under the left, and began to pound Honey Baker's ribs until he felt the ropes against his back.

"You change your mind, you bum?" Gross said, hammering him down low with both hands.

"It's for real," Jimmy answered through the pain he felt, battling to get off the ropes.

He knew now why he had bought that fur coat. It wasn't to pay off a dame. She wasn't a dame anyway. But she'd been cold, and he guessed he loved her or he wouldn't care whether she froze or not.

Lou Gross kept flaying him, but he got loose and danced away. His ribs were sore and he tasted a little salt in his mouth. The stuff in second Eddie's pail was going to be red by the time the buzzer sounded, he knew.

Lou Gross crowded him, and tagged him with shots that hurt him from skin to bone. He thought they'd never ring the bell.

They worked on him furiously. There were swabs in Jimmy's teeth. Eddie gave him a pedalling, telling himself he was daft. Lou Gross was the boss in this ring. There was no cheese in him.

Twice he rode away from Lou's hard right, but the third time he had to take it. He knew he must have bounced when he hit.

Everything in the arena began to undulate, as if it were under water. In front of his eyes when he heard the ref say "six" were three faces. They all belonged to Tully Blonder, and they all looked very sick.

He was on his hands and knees at the count of eight, still staring at Blonder. He wanted to rest his tired body there on the canvas for the next half hour. Then he remembered that a gent named Honey Baker had never lost a professional fight.

message from Tully Blonder he scarcely heard. The devil with Blonder! Over there, Lou Gross' manager was beating his gums against Lou's ear. The manager was burning. He saw Lou Gross nod at the buzzer and wondered what was going to cook.

Honey Baker did not have to wonder long. Halfway through the round he got an opening too good to be kosher. He threw his right and caught Gross on the jaw but high. The fighter went down.

The ref started to count, but Honey Baker did not move away. With the third man warning him, he yelled down at Lou.

"Get up, you bum! Get up and fight, meatball, or I'll smear you up with every fight club in the country!"

LOU GROSS got up at the count of six, and his eyes told Honey Baker it was for keeps the rest of the way.

Jimmy Nagle put up his dukes and started

He was up before the count ended. He held on to a rope with his left hand and beat back Lou Gross with his right. The bell saved him.

Eddie loosened his waistband and let cool air fan his lumpy meridian. Ammonia fumes bit into his nostrils, and some of the humming inside his head passed away. They were telling him, while they worked, what Tully was going to do to him, but he knew Tully would do nothing. Tully's idea was that he was to win. It was his own business if he wanted it the hard way.

It was in the sixth round and Lou Gross wanted to finish it, so he got a little careless. But the opening he gave Honey Baker's right hand was not intended. A wet glove exploded against his chin and he went down. He banged the back of his head on the floor of the ring.

Honey Baker backed away, feeling the pain run up from his right hand to his shoulder.

It made him a little sick. He prayed Lou wouldn't get up.

But Lou Gross was no bum. He was up at nine, moving around fast and protecting himself. There was blood on his mouth, but he grinned when he threw his arms around Honey Baker to last out the round.

"For real, you crosser!" Lou said.

Honey Baker had one good hand for the rest of the fight. The one he had hurt in the army was completely wrecked now. It lay across his knee like a block of wood and its terrible ache went all the way to his stomach. He would die if the fight had to go two more rounds. "I hope he kills you, you punk!" he heard his handler say.

There was the buzzer, the warning signal. Some strength he had lost came back when he saw how slowly Lou Gross came out. And more returned when he remembered that someone was thinking of Honey Baker all during the fight. Having someone depending on you made you want to fight. He knew now what he had never known before, why Tony and Abe back at camp had been able to accept going to war.

In close, Lou Gross breathed heavily. Work on his boilers! That was the place to put the torps! Lou was not over the effects of that last round so Honey Baker moved in, scarcely feeling the shots Gross drove home. He sunk his fist deep into Lou's stomach. The left fist. He was saving that stick of wood that was his right.

The odds were with him in more ways than one, he decided. He could throw everything left in him into this round, for it was his last fight. But Lou Gross had to save something of himself for the fights he had booked ahead.

He ducked under Lou's desperate lunge and buried his left glove deep into Lou's middle once more. He drove Lou to the ropes and nailed him there.

He sunk his left deep into the exhausted fighter's stomach again. Then he got the chance to throw the stick of wood. Lou's mouth hung open and his mouthpiece dropped out. Jimmy Nagle pulled the trigger. The numbed right hand exploded against the side of Lou's head.

By the sound of the man's falling he knew the party was over.

Afterward, Tully handed Honey Baker the balance of his purse. He smelled of the sweat he had lost during the ordeal, and in his one good eye was left some of the agony he had suffered.

"You're washed up here, Baker," he said. "You won't never get another fight."

"Go wash your own dirty neck," Jimmy Nagle said. "You got your dough, Tully. Me, I got somethin' I never had before, but you wouldn't understand. I can't go back to war, but I can go where they make the stuff to fight it with. Goodbye, rat."

SHE was waiting for him just inside the door of the Y.W.C.A. He had the big box under his arm. He quickly placed it across her knees.

She wore the same thin shabby coat but somewhere she had picked up a nice looking little hat.

"I win, baby," he said. "And Honey Baker kept his promise. Open it up, Mary. Open it."

She reached out and touched the swollen knuckles with her soft fingers.

"Your hand?" she said. "It's badly hurt."

"It's been through two wars, baby. It's earned a pension now. But open the package, Mary. Open it."

She loosened the string, lifted the cover off the box.

She stopped breathing as she ran her fingers over the warm fur.

"From Honey Baker, baby," he said.

"It's beautiful, so very beautiful." She looked up at him with the tears shining in her eyes. "But don't you see, I couldn't take it from you, Jimmy?"

"And why not, baby?" he asked her. "Isn't it okay for a girl to take a present from the guy she's going to marry?"

She couldn't say anything. She just kept looking at him.

"What you think I've been fightin' for tonight?" he went on. "You're not a smart dame with all the answers. Somebody should look after you. I'm only tryin' to say—"

"Jimmy," she suddenly said. She got up and stood very close to him. "I think perhaps I could take the coat. Help me on with it, and let's see if it fits."

It was perfect.

She left the old coat where she had thrown it and went out with him. She looked very warm, and exceptionally beautiful in his eyes. He took her arm crossing the street and the feeling was good. He had something to protect now. Something to love and fight for.

He was no longer on his own.

●

THRILLS IN SPORTS

By JACK KOFOED

FAMOUS SPORTS COMMENTATOR

GAME ERNIE SCHAAF FIGHTS HIS LAST BOUT

I RETURNED from Bermuda on a cold, sunny winter morning. That night Ernie Schaaf was to fight Primo Carnera at Madison Square Garden, and I did not want to miss it.

Schaaf was a friend of mine. He was a big, blond, handsome man and at one time it seemed he might become heavyweight champion of the world.

Not very long before Ernie had boxed Max Baer in Chicago. He had outpointed the Livermore Larruper most of the way, but just before the final bell Baer landed a murderous right to the chin. Schaaf was unconscious on the floor when the fight ended. It didn't go down as a knockout in his record, but that's really what it was.

"I'll lick that big Pisan tonight," Schaaf said, when I dropped in to see him.

"Feeling good?" I asked.

"No," he admitted. "I've been having headaches. Never had any before in my life. Maybe it's my eyes. or my stomach."

I sat at the ringside that night and watched. There was something wrong with Ernie. He seemed logy and slow. There was no steam behind his blows. Of course, Carnera was no great shakes as a hitter, and he didn't want to open himself to one of Schaaf's wallops. So he jabbed with his mast-like left, covered up, stepped back.

It was a very dull fight.

The wise boys around the ring began to talk.

"It's in the bag," they said. "Ernie has sold out. Betcha."

I didn't believe it. Schaaf was not that kind of a guy. He was always in there trying. Nobody could buy him.

Then Primo landed a jab. It was like most of his jabs—a push, with no snap to it. Ernie went down. He lay on the ring floor while the referee counted him out.

"See? There it is. The payoff. Didn't I tell you?" The wise boys were happy, because their judgment had apparently been vindicated. "That punch wouldn't have knocked me out."

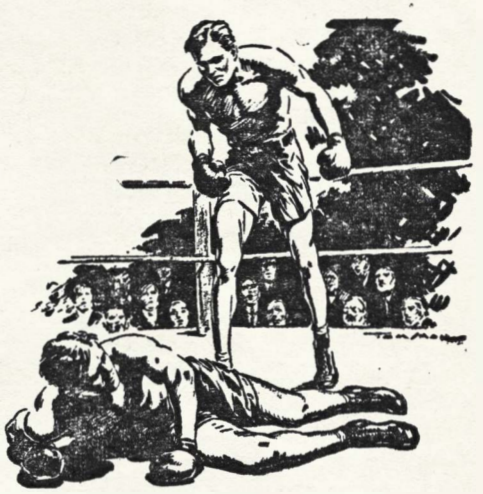
Schaaf was dragged to his corner.

"Lookit him," the wise ones chortled. "What an actor—what an actor!"

Ernie's head hung on his chest. His eyes were partly opened so you could see the whites. Spittle drooled from the corner of his mouth.

"If he's faking," I said, "he's got John Barrymore licked."

A doctor made a hasty examination. A stretcher was brought into the ring. The big, handsome body was placed on it and taken



to the Polyclinic Hospital around the corner.

A faker? A thrower of fights? Not that! Ernie Schaaf was a dying man.

I had seen Frankie Jerome killed in the ring. I felt in my heart that this friend of mine was going, too, though I prayed the surgeons would pull him through.

The men of medicine discovered Ernie had suffered a brain injury as a result of his fight with Baer. That had been the cause of his headaches. The final punch by Carnera was merely a contributing factor. They trephined his skull. They did everything possible for him, but reports were not encouraging.

Still, there was hope. The big man had such strength and stamina that he might pull through, they said, but my heart was heavy.

Monday night I was sound asleep when at four in the morning the telephoned jangled. It was the city desk.

"Schaaf just died! We'll need an obituary. How about whipping one up?"

Huddled in a bathrobe, I sat down to the typewriter in that icy room, and wrote about my friend. It was the last gesture I could make for the big blond man, who had been so game.

PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES ARE TOURNAMENT TOUGH!

PROFESSIONAL athletes are tough—tough of body and of spirit.

In long years of covering professional sports, I have seen men take brutal punishment, and come gamely back for more. The brittle man does not last long.

Do you remember Eddie Shore, one of the best hockey players of all time, when he was with the Boston Bruins? That speedy, bald headed veteran would be gashed by a puck or stick, leave the ice to be stitched by the team doctor, and return to resume his reckless, headlong play.

Chuck Gardiner, who starred for the Chicago Black Hawks, was equally impervious to punishment. Chuck was a goal tender and out of the top drawer, as they say. One night in Toronto he was hit in the head by the puck and knocked out cold. It required twenty-two stitches to close that gaping wound. But, Gardiner came back.

A little later he was hit again, and this time they needleworked six stitches into his skull. Did that keep him out? I should say not. He finished the contest, though the average man would have carried his aching head to bed for a long rest.

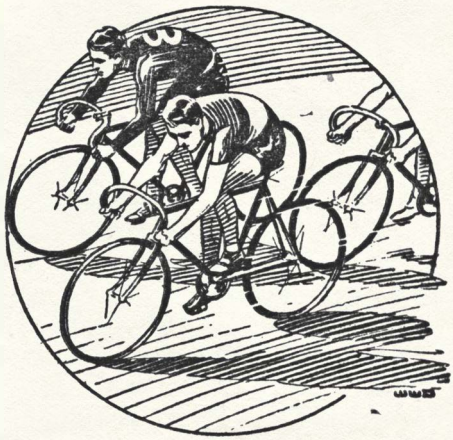
The six-day bike race demands just as much stamina and resistance to pain as does the saga of the ice.

I remember a six-day bike race in Madison Square Garden. One of the riders was Carl Stockholm, during the last war a Navy commander in the Pacific. In the warmup session before the race started, Carl blew a tire at the top of the track, and skidded down to the flat.

Almost all the skin was burned from his face in the fall, a rib cracked, and his body was covered with contusions. But, when the opening gun sent the teams off for the six day night, Stockholm was in the saddle. His head was so swathed in bandages that he looked like an Egyptian mummy, but there was nothing slow about his riding.

Day after day he shed those bandages until, along about Thursday, they had all been removed. Carl's face was a mass of scabs and bruises, but he was in there kicking the pedals all the time. This took not only courage, but stamina and resistance to pain.

Such qualities, of course, are not monopolized by professional athletes. The war proved that beyond any dispute. The Marines at Iwo Jimo, Guadalcanal and Okinawa were average young Americans. Yet, they endured pain, fear, hunger, while they smashed the power of Japan. So did the fliers in the skies above Germany and the Pacific; and the infantry who fought on bloody Omaha beach and in the Bulge.



Yet, I think, in a small way, these boys received some inspiration from the great athletes they had seen in action, and the traditions that had grown up about those men.

I never saw the spirit of determination more bitterly demonstrated than when Jimmy Hanlon, who was called "the Denver Caveman," fought George Chaney. Chaney, though hardly more than a featherweight, owned a heavyweight's power in his fists. Pound for pound, there never was a fighter who punched as viciously as he.

Hanlon was rugged and tough, but was no boxer. He waded in, taking blows and giving them. The clever, fast-stepping fellows had a chance with the Baltimore knockout king, but none who fought as Jimmy did ever lasted the limit with George.

The first round was a pattern of what was to happen. Hanlon charged like a mad bull, wide open, raging. Chaney clipped him, and Jimmy staggered. His lips tightened, his eyes glazed, but he came in again. By the end of the round, weak and exhausted, he was hanging on the ropes, apparently ripe for the kill.

Chaney thought he had a soft touch. A fellow he could land on as easily as that

couldn't last long. Ah, but that was where George was wrong! Round after round he hammered the man from Colorado. Hanlon's body was belted with crimson. Blood dripped from his wounds. His eyes puffed nearly shut. A dozen times he seemed on the verge of going down, and staying down, but he never did. At the end of the fight Jimmy was wading into the barrage as earnestly as he had at the start.

Victory isn't the be-all and the end-all. Chaney won that fight, but Hanlon deserved the bright red badge of courage for the desperate, hopeless fight he waged.

GOLF THRILLS ON THE GRAPEFRUIT CIRCUIT

THE greatest golf tournament from the spectator's viewpoint is the International Four-Ball at Miami, Fla. Two stars are teamed together, their best ball counting in match play against other teams.

There have been countless thrills. Back in 1940 Craig Wood and Billy Burke came to the seventeenth green at the Miami-Biltmore Country Club. The sun was going down behind the trees and the end of the day, as well as the end of the match, was close at hand.

Wood and Burke were one down. Craig's ball lay at the top of the big green that sloped away from him. There were forty feet of turf between him and the cup—and he had to get that ball in to keep the match going.

I remember how calmly the big, handsome blond man stepped up to his ball. He seemed almost casual, but there must have been tumult in his heart. Every competitor wanted to win the Four-Ball. It was a great feather in any golfer's cap to come through that event.

Wood didn't waste time. He stroked the ball smoothly. The little white pellet rolled along the emerald of the grass. It was a fine putt, as everyone could see, but many a fine putt has rimmed the cup, or stopped inches short. This one didn't. It dropped—and the veteran team went on to win after several extra holes.

Then, there was the 1929 tournament. Walter Hagen and Leo Diegel were paired. For three straight matches Leo played brilliant, if somewhat desperate, golf. He had to, for his debonair partner spent nights of gaiety in the hot spots, and came to the course tired and draggy.

That's too much pressure for any man. Diegel finally cracked midway of the final round, and The Haig took over. He birdied four of the last five holes. His weariness was gone. That magnificent competitive instinct of his came to the surface.

On the last hole, everyone but Walter had putted out. He had a twelve footer to get down to win the championship. He squatted, and studied the putt. Just as he took his stance a big police dog broke through the gallery, trotted up to Hagen, and nudged him from behind.

That would have broken the concentration of many a fine golfer. It did not bother Walter in the least. He patted the animal, and said, "Just a minute, pup, until I sink this one and then we'll get something to eat."

Without further hesitation he hit the ball

into the can, lit a cigaret, and strolled away with his new found friend!

The fact that Diegel had played brilliantly for 108 holes and Hagen for five or six was, of course, instantly forgotten. The Haig received all the credit for winning that match.

The year before Gene Sarazen and Johnny Farrell went to the final round against Tommy Armour and Bobby Cruickshank. Gene and Jawn were in the lead most of the way, but they faltered and the Black Scot squared the match with a birdie four on the long fifteenth.

Then, on the sixteenth, Farrell canned one that must have been fifty feet long. He always was a magician on the greens.

"That lucky stiff!" grunted Armour. "Did you ever see anything like it?

Rain began to fall and bright umbrellas sprouted all over the fairway. On the seventeenth, all four players hit the green with their second shots. Farrell's was the poorest. His ball lay at least thirty feet away, while the others were from ten to twelve from the pin.

But, you never could tell with Farrell. He trundled the putt in and his handsome Irish face broke into a smile a mile wide.

This is a tough tournament to win. Only Henry Picard and Johnny Revolta have managed three triumphs in the twenty-one times it has been played. Those fellows always had an amazing knack of teaming together. But for real tough luck there's Willie Klein, who has played in nineteen of the tournaments, and hasn't won yet, even though he is a fine golfer.

When you figure it takes a best ball of 64, 65 and sometimes less for each round to win, it's not hard to see this is perhaps the toughest golfing test along the trail that stretches from Coast to Coast.

BASEBALL'S OLD FIREHORSES WERE A LOYAL LOT

THERE are heart throbs as well as thrills in sports.

Back in 1879 Tom Sullivan was signed to catch Charlie Radbourne, who was to become one of the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball. They worked together on the Dubuque team of the Western League for the munificent salary of $75 a month each.

Like most players of that era, Sullivan was a reckless, hard-drinking, generous Irishman. Though a dollar had a purchasing power of four or five times as much as today, Tom never had a buck in his pocket a week after pay day.

The years raced by, as they have a habit of doing. Sullivan wore out as a ball player, and went to live in the Kerry Patch in St. Louis. He worked as a laborer and loved to sit around in bar-rooms, talking baseball.

His hair grayed. Lines etched themselves in his face. His shoulders bowed, and there was no more money in his pockets than there had been when he played ball.

The old timers died off; most of them in poverty. Jack Cullinane had been a teammate of Sullivan in the old days. He had been a veteran when Tom was a youngster. His joints creaked, and his eyes watered. He wasn't able to work any longer, so they sent him to the poorhouse.

Neither Cullinane nor his friend considered that a disgrace. When a man had seen his day and was through—penniless and old—there was only one place for him, the almshouse.

Whenever he could Tom went to see the old man. They'd sit in the sun, and discuss the great old days on the diamond. They talked about Charlie Comiskey, "the Old Roman," of Radbourne, and Billy Taylor and Ted Sullivan. They called to mind great catches and long hits. For a little while they lived over the thrills they had shared.

It wasn't much—but memories are often bright, gay things that make a drab existence livable. At any rate, they were all Tom Sullivan and Jack Cullinane had left. As for Tom, chances were he would join Jack in the poorhouse within a few years.

One Christmas eve, Sullivan sat in his little room in the Patch and thought of his old friend. He remembered a day last summer

when he had said, "Come Christmas eve, Jack, I'll bring you a bottle of the real juice."

How the broken-down old ball player would look forward to that bottle of whisky!

Sullivan had it. But the poorhouse was seven miles from the Kerry Patch and a whipping snowstorm lashed the city. It was no fit night for man or beast to be abroad, particularly for a man of Tom Sullivan's age.

"I might come a croppy," he thought to himself, "but it'll be a sad Christmas for Jack unless he gets this bottle."

Tom had no greatcoat, so he wrapped a

(Concluded on page 91)

Things were beginning to go black in front of Link's eyes

MILER'S HEART

By JOE GREGG

When the school was in a spot, Miler Link Langer had to choose between personal credit for himself — or glory for the team!

HE was surprised when he came in from the supper stint at Commons and found Ritchey Dixon waiting for him in his sparse, dingy room over on the cheap end of town. He was also suddenly aware of the fly-specked wallpaper, the torn windowshade, the yellowed, cracked wash-basin-and-pitcher on the dowdy stand.

Dixon was not only upper-crust at Kingston University. The Dixons were upper-crust in America. All Kingston, like all Gaul of ancient days, was divided into three parts. The Kingston division consisted of the upper-crusters like Dixon, the athletes and the ordinary run of students—'Stew-goats'—who came for glamour, convenience or speciality in some subject and stayed grimly on or left, depending on the relative amount of sand in the individual make-up.

In a way, old Kingston was like America. You had the rich, the middle class, the poor. It was democratic, too, in a way—like America. You didn't have castes, but you did have clubs. "Eating clubs," they called

them—as the University Club or the Union Club or the Knickerbocker Club—or Dinty Moore's—is an eating club.

In the same way, you might consider Barney's Diner an eating club. They had food there and they had people to eat the food so if you got along with the food and the people got along with you, you were accepted.

To foster the democratic principles on which this country was founded, Kingston made all freshmen eat at the great dining hall, the "Commons," throughout Frosh year. Then, it having been established by that gesture that everything was nice and democratic, the three classes—the rich, the middle-class, and the poor—went their respective ways.

The transition was easiest for the poor in that they just stayed on eating at Commons. The rich went to the ivy-girt clubs—the middle-class, the athletes and the others who had money but no ivy, to their lesser, but swank, clubs.

It had never occurred to Link Langer that he himself represented a fourth group at old Kingston—a star athlete who rated high social standing through his mother's father, but who stayed on at Commons through choice.

Langer, now a junior and the country's crack miler, could have his pick of clubs among the athletic set-ups, even Castle, perhaps, the top-hat deal on Club Row. There had been a time when he had wanted it.

Some of this flashed through his mind as he nodded to Ritchey Dixon, track team captain and so-so miler. Link came into his own room from waiting table at Commons and found Ritchey there. Link had long since eaten the bitter fruit of his own too-enthusiastic acceptance of people at their face value. And he was too busy making ends meet to worry about it—much, anyway.

Dixon got to his feet from the nailed-together easy chair and looked capable and friendly in his tweeds and the casual grin on his tanned, good-looking face.

"Hi, Link! Busy?"

Langer thought of the chemistry and physics stuff he had to bone up on, his gray eyes going automatically to the littered desk.

"Sort of," he said flatly. "But sit down, Dixon. What can I do for you?"

Dixon's smile was embarrassed, but his brown eyes were trying to be matter-of-fact. He smoothed his already smooth hair into place.

"Oh, nothing in particular," he murmured. "Just a sociable visit."

"Oh?" Langer hung his gray jacket in the curtained-off space of a 'closet'. Dixon was Kingston's half-miler, and ran the mile, too—always behind Link. He was also a senior, and team captain. "Sort of sudden, isn't it? Or is it?"

Dixon flushed.

"I came by a couple of times, a year ago. Or maybe it was longer. I don't know. You weren't ever here."

"I work," Link said, "or hadn't you heard? I wait table, run a laundry-agency, sell books and supplies. I have tuition bills to pay, as well as support myself. Anyway, I've been seeing you quite a bit around the gym over a period of three years."

Dixon got to his feet.

"This was a friendly call, Link. Partly in your interests, and Kingston's, too. But if you'd rather not have me stay, just say so."

"Sit down," Link grinned. "Just having my fun."

After a moment, Dixon sat down again.

"Fun, you say? Sure it isn't your pound of flesh you are having, Link?"

LINK shrugged, but the humor had gone out of his eyes.

"Have it your own way. But about talking over *my* interests, Dixon—are you sure you mean just that? It's taken you pretty long to get into a tizzy over me!"

"Okay," Dixon said. "Okay, Link. You're right. You're single-minded about one thing, I'll admit—about Link Langer. Link Langer is foremost in your plans and in your heart.

"I'm probably a fool to ask what I'm going to ask, but it's for Kingston, not for me. I want to ask you, Link, as a fellow-Kingstonian, to run the half-mile, and the two-mile relay, and not just the mile alone. How about it, fella?"

Link found some chewing-gum on the desk, took a piece and offered Dixon a piece, which was refused. He stripped a rectangle of the stuff, rolled it into a ball, and popped it into his mouth.

"No soap," he said, after a few chews. "In fact, I've been sort of thinking of giving up track entirely. I mean, here at Kingston. In fact, I'm thinking of giving up Kingston. Does that answer it?"

Dixon studied him a long moment.

"Oh," he said, and shifted his legs uncrossed. "I didn't know your secret time

trials were so good! In other words, you've got everything out of Kingston you can, so you're on your way. Right?"

Link chewed a little more slowly, but there was no other change about him.

"What do you mean, my time trials must be better?"

"Do you deny you are after the first four-minute mile?" Dixon asked flatly. "And that Coach Lars Weaver has given three years of his time to prepping you for it?"

"I'm paying my way," Link said. "Financially and on the track team. I contribute my little points. In the mile."

"But not enough points," Dixon objected. "Kingston has a chance to win the IC-Four-A this year, outdoors. Kingston and Weaver. But we need *you*. Kingston needs you in two other events, the half and the two-mile relay. Kingston—"

"Cut the 'rah-rah' stuff," Link interrupted. "Kingston not only does not need me, it didn't even *want* me! Or didn't you ever hear that story? Ask Corman, of the New York Kingston Club. He can tell you. Well, I came on my own, working my way through one-hundred percent.

"I'm staying that way. One-hundred percent for ol' Langer, that's me! I'm going to run the first four-minute mile. Me, Link Langer. Not Kingston. I'm *not* working the half. Understand?"

"You are clear and cold as ice," Dixon aid, getting up.

"Don't slam the door after you," Link said. "It's only on one hinge. And do drop by any time you are slumming again. But just remember this, pal and captain—*I'm* paying Link Langer's way through. *I'm* running Link Langer's races for him. *I'm* going to run the first four-minute mile. *I'm*—"

He stopped because Ritchey Dixon couldn't hear him any longer. Dixon had slammed both doors. Link's and the front door.

Langer thought about it a moment, his hand tugging an ear lobe, his face in a frown. He wondered if Lars Weaver had had anything to do with Dixon's visit, but he wasn't overly interested. Weaver treated Link just as Link treated Weaver—with a detached, impersonal interest that touched on Track, conditioning, tactics, timing, habits and nothing else.

It had been because of Weaver, in a way, that Link had first begun dreaming of Kingston, back in his high school days. Weaver was the great mile coach. Weaver himself had been a great miler, an Olympic champ, an old record holder. Until then Link had thought of Kingston a lot, but in the same way that a hungry man thinks of a beautiful roast of beef or a browned, succulent turkey and then settles for rice-with-gravy.

Link's father had died years before and his mother lived in a small town on her modest income as town librarian. So money to spend on an education at a place like Kingston was out of the question.

True, many youngsters worked their way through partially, a gifted few entirely. But Link's gifts were his rugged heart, his huge lungs, and his sturdy runner's legs.

For these physical attributes, some colleges paid with scholarships. But Lars Weaver, world's greatest mile coach, was not at just some colleges. Weaver was at Kingston.

In time, Link heard that a few old grads at the New York Kingston Club saw to it that athletes without too much in the way of wordly goods were given scholarships. By the club. He had gone to see them about it, reluctantly, but determined to leave nothing undone that could get him into Kingston.

He still smarted when he thought of that interview with "Pudge" Corman, old time Kingston football great.

Long and earnestly had Link talked of his admiration for Weaver and then modestly, but thoroughly, exhibited his collection of clippings and awards as a miler. Corman had terminated the intererview gruffly and abruptly.

"Sorry, not interested," the burly old-timer had said flatly. "In fact, Langer, if you had all the money in the world, I'd warn you not to go to Kingston. You're—well, just not our type. Not a Kingston man, that's all, not the right caliber."

FAR from being a deterrent, Corman had sparked in Link a savage desire to be a Kingston man despite Corman, his scholarships and the inviting bids from other institutions of higher learning.

He'd stayed out of school a year while he worked and boned up on subjects, saving every cent, chiseling and denying himself to add to his growing hoard of dimes and dollars. Shrewdly he had lined up an agency for textbooks with a distributor who had no Kingston business. He also had made another contact with a laundry some sixteen miles from the college that had little business there.

Langer entered Kingston a year late, but on his own. The year of additional growth and strength hadn't hurt him any. Freshman year had been not too bad, because he had a little accumulated reserve to draw on. But when sophomore year came and tentative bids to clubs had been put out as feelers, he had turned them down because he couldn't afford it. And because he was still rankling.

Grimly he spent all his wakeful moments either at track or studies or in pursuit of business that would mean commissions, to add to his sparse pile of dollars in the bank.

It meant limiting his contacts among his classmates and teammates. It meant working when others were having fun. It meant sweat and routine when others were playing pool at their clubs, playing cards at their clubs, or were attending dances at their clubs.

Gradually he won the reputation of being a grouch, of having a grudge against his mates. And then, when his racing time went from good to crack to stellar, he was accused of having a big head. But he shrugged it off. You didn't fight gnats when the wolves were at your heels.

Often he'd wondered what Corman's reactions were when that old-school-tie man picked up a sports page and saw that "Langer of Kingston" had again lowered the record, that "Langer of Kingston" was speculated on as perhaps the man to run the first four-minute mile.

But he was so busy he didn't have much time for that sort of speculation.

Thinking of it again now, he bestirred himself to get to his desk and clean up his back work in physics and chemistry. He yawned, turned on the desk lamp and was searching out some papers when something hit him hard.

He sat there, hand outstretched, working with the puzzling thought of it.

"What did Dixon mean when he said I was having my 'pound of flesh'?" he puzzled. "I never even so much as mentioned Corman to him, until tonight. So he couldn't know. Or could he? I wonder what he was getting at? 'Getting even,' he said. Hmmmm!"

He gave it up with a shrug in another few minutes and glanced at his notes, then yanked his books close to him, sweeping the unwanted rubble onto the floor.

The outdoor season had opened and Link keened to the snap of the air and the warming rays of the sun and the perfect spring of America's fastest outdoor track.

He heard the grunt of the field men as they danced under the balance of the 16-pound shot and skipped forward to heave the ball far and high to a thudding contact with the ground, the staccato footbeats of the hurdlers as they sped swiftly, the breaking off of the beats as they sailed, then dug again.

He watched the graceful soaring of Tudory, who was trying to be the world's second man to top fifteen feet in the pole vault, listened to the crunch of spikes in cinders as the sprinting broad-jumpers raced to the marker, then hurled themselves high and leaned slightly to one side, their feet treading-water, as they sought to better their last jumps.

This was meat and drink and life itself to Link Langer. He knew if he ever made the talked-of four-minute mile, it would be outdoors. On this, the world's fastest outdoor track, he might. He knew, too, who would perhaps push him to that mark—Chuck Darrier, of Navy.

Darrier was built like Cunningham, where Link was more the Bonthron or Venzke type. Darrier was husky, shorter than Link, powerful of thigh and leg—but smooth-striding and smart. Darrier had followed Link for two years in high school, and three in college. And in all those years of rivalry at the mile, he had beaten Link but once—the first race they had run.

It was a friendly rivalry in that the two raced purposefully and dramatically, but never grudgingly, never with animosity. Every year, every month, every meet that Link bested Annapolis's Darrier, the husky midshipman would smile dourly and shake hands.

"I'll get you next time, fella. Remember that—I'll get you!" he would say.

Darrier had one style of racing, which was to let the clever-pacing Link set the speed, then try and blast past him anywhere from the last quarter to the tape itself.

Twice Darrier had run under the world's record—but each time he was just a step behind Link.

Navy had cleaned up last year's IC-4-A, with Kingston not even figuring importantly in the running. But with Tudory soaring to just short of fifteen feet this year, with some hurdlers coming into their own, and with Navy's great weight and field men graduated, Kingston was better than a threat. Kingston was a distinct possibility. IF everything went just right, and IF Navy maybe faltered.

BUT these were things that Link only knew from reading the papers, from hearing talk about them in the locker-rooms, the showers. From the time he had run his first mile under 4:05, his mind had been occupied with one thing only and that was the four-minute mile.

And when he mentioned it to Lars Weaver, that old-time star had nodded.

"Well-l, someone is going to do it, and why not you? If you had clipped just one second off each of those quarter-miles—if you had maybe started your sprint twenty yards before you did—if your condition had been a little keener, your warming-up a little better —you'd have made it.

"But remember this, Langer—when anybody is doing anything close to any record, there isn't very much chance for improvement. Right?"

"Yes, but if I'm in better condition?"

"Langer—what's the important thing in a miler? *The* important thing?"

Link had considered.

"Sense of timing, perfect respiratory set-up—lungs, throat, nose—to carry air to the system so the most air possible will be distributed through the blood, co-ordination of arms with legs, running straight-toed, to cover the most distance with the same effort —and heart.

"Your heart must be in perfect shape so it can pump the blood and the air into your lungs. Too, you must have the 'heart' to stand off the other runner's sprint challenge. And tactics—you must be smart enough not to let yourself get pocketed. Then, if you are going to pass a man after you start around a turn—

"As I said," the great coach stated, "all details are important. But you can chuck them all away if you have a bum heart. In *any* respect. It's the heart that makes the miler in the final analysis. Have you got that, a perfect heart?"

"I think I have. So do the doctors."

"Then you and the doctors think you will be the great miler."

At the time Link had been puzzled—but then Weaver said many puzzling things. And Link made sure nothing would interfere with his heart—nothing, be it smoking, late hours, muscular strain, choice of foods.

So now he warmed up carefully, shrewdly. He tuned up with some calisthenics, skipped the rope for fifteen minutes, rested, trotted a very slow 440, then topped off with two bursts of 75-yard sprints. Weaver was watching him when he finished.

"How's it, Link?"

"Feels pretty good," the Miler said. "Very good."

"How's the old ticker?"

"Good." Link looked at the man more than casually. "I think it's about the way it should be."

"Then you think you'll do a good job Saturday. Okay, Link."

Link stared after the man curiously.

"Darned if I can figure that fellow out," he murmured. "He's—puzzling."

But there was nothing puzzling about Lars Weaver's style of coaching—not with Link feeling as he did, going as he did—or the rest of the team, too, for that matter. Link didn't ever think Weaver knew field and the other events as he knew the Mile. Link himself didn't even think about the other events, any too much.

He took a warm shower and had a light rubdown. He nodded briefly to the other members of the team when they spoke to him. Someone came by and patted him on the back and walked on. Link looked up and was so surprised he held his sock suspended in mid-air a full minute.

It was Ritchey Dixon.

"The old-school tie," Link murmured, as he continued with his dressing. "Rah-rah-rah, KingsTON!"

He jammed on his battered hat and left.

Michigan arrived on Saturday for a dual meet, a gesture of the Ivy of the Midwest to the Ivy of the East. Before the meet Lars Weaver came along, "No fast stuff today over the distance, Link," he said. "Right? Too early. I'd rather have you do a fast half."

"Huh?" Link stared. "No mile at all?"

"Well, whatever you need to win," Weaver said. "But I want you to try pacing the half. You are used to quarters. I want you to think in terms of a fast half. You and I know that when the four-minute mile is run, it will be with a bruising last half. Right? It is that third quarter that is the showdown in the mile."

Link's eyes were watchful.

"I thought you'd agreed to let me concentrate on the mile only? Nothing but the mile, ever."

The coach scratched his gray thatch and pursed his lips reflectively.

"You skip rope, don't you? You run burst-sprints, don't you? You even *walk* quarter-

miles, don't you?"

"For training and conditioning, yes."

"So what's wrong with running a half for conditioning? Or are you afraid you might get beaten at the shorter distance? Hazen of Michigan is fair, but I expect even Dixon can take him. Dixon is an okay half-miler, you know. Not tops at the mile, though."

"I'll run," Link said flatly, "if you say so. But I hope this doesn't get to be a regular thing. I want to work the mile."

"I'll make you a deal," Weaver smiled slightly. "The next half you run will be at your request."

"Okay, boss," Link sighed. "Now, look—in that rest I take before my mile—do you think I am angling my legs as high as I should? Nurmi used something real high, I was reading, to make sure he'd get the maximum of blood back from his legs into his heart before he went out for his race. What do you think?"

"Rest them on the locker tops, if you will feel any better about it and can reach them from the floor. You're worrying too much about details."

"But you said details count."

"They do. But the important thing is your heart. Have you a good heart? Really a good, strong heart?"

"I think so, sure."

"Then you think you are a great miler. Good! Now, take it easy in the mile, because the half comes thirty minutes later. See you, Link!"

And the coach left.

"Queer duck," Link mused. "Sometimes I think I know him like my old shoes. And other times I wonder."

A GOOD crowd was in Turner Stadium for the meet, Michigan being a prime favorite in the East. Then there was the added interest in Kingston as the possible IC-4-A winner.

Kingston went into a nice lead in the sprints and their more-than-fair weight men made them topheavy favorites. When the mile came up, Gotch and Jenkins of Michigan lined up with Link and Dixon. At the crack of the gun Link got away fast from his outside position, held with the three others around the turn, they came off it fast before he attempted to pass.

Once in the lead he slowed his pace, timing himself for a 4:16 to 4:18 mile. He let his moderately long, easy stride pick up for a good third quarter and was challenged briefly as he paced along the backstretch. But he held to his pace evenly and breezed in the winner in 4: 19.

"Nice timing," Weaver approved. "Lie down for a bit, but don't make the mistake of not warming up enough for the half. Your muscles can stiffen up plenty in thirty minutes."

Link nodded, lay down for a complete rest, covered up. A little later he took a light rub, then had his legs and chest and stomach coated with wintergreen and rested full-out, his feet up on a basket. Juggy Moore, the trainer, came to him fifteen minutes before the half-mile.

"Better roll out and warm yourself up, Link."

"I'm okay. I didn't run myself out, Juggy. I think I'll lie here until five minutes before the race. Okay?"

"Okay by me," the trainer said. He scratched his blue jaw, appeared about to speak, but shrugged and walked off. "Okay by me."

While he lay there, Link suddenly wondered what sort of half Dixon ran. He blinked when it came to him that he hadn't the vaguest idea. Vainly, he cast his mind back to some of the detailed records of Kingston meets.

"Must be under two minutes," he thought. "Maybe one fifty-eight, or one fifty-seven?"

"Hey, Juggy!" he yelled. But when the trainer came, he thought better of it, decided not to ask. It might sound foolish that he didn't know how his own teammates did in their best events. So when the gnarled old trainer stuck his head in and answered, he shrugged it off.

"Nothing. Skip it. Let me know five minutes before the race, huh?"

Juggy did.

They lined up with Hazen at the rail, Link next, then Norris of Michigan and Ritchey Dixon on the outside. Link pranced with legs going high and his arms working in pistonlike punches. He admitted to himself that Juggy had ben right. Five minutes wasn't enough warm-up time between the events.

He felt stiff, sloppy, not on edge as he liked to feel. But he didn't let it get him too much. The first quarter he figured to do in 0: 57 or 0: 58—the final quarter in whatever he had to. An even race should do it—no gruelling third quarter here.

He crouched at the call of "Mark!" and slanted his eyes right and left. Hazen looked like a sprinter who was doubling in the half. He was slender, but wiry—long-legged.

"Set!"

He came up in his starting stance, everything flexed, ready. The starter was experienced, smooth—not like some of these jokers who seem to delight in puzzling the men, getting them off in a false start or even disqualifying someone for a fast start. You could darn near check a stop-watch on this man's smooth performance.

The gun cracked and the four men were off as if catapulted from a common robot starter.

It was two circuits of the track for the half. Hazen and Norris blazed out in a mad sprint, but it was Ritchey Dixon who slammed into the lead as they hit the first turn.

Link felt a momentary surprise and tried to raise his pace. He wasn't flowing into it as he should. He setled in the ruck, but close, and drifted with the head runners down the stretch and into the turn for the first quarter. Coming out of the turn, he stepped the pace up, matched his stride, his left leg tying into the right-leg pace of the man just ahead of him.

That would save him from allowing too much space, and would keep him perhaps six inches from the other when he passed him. The distance was measured one foot out from the rail and there was no chance of passing the head-runner one foot out.

But there was no sense in using more distance than was absolutely necessary to pass. It meant space and space meant time. And time meant effort, strength, stamina.

Then they were breasting the stands at the quarter and the other three were putting on the pressure. Link realized with disgust that he had figured this thing out wrong, that he should have slammed out and fought for the lead.

As it was now, he was running wide, was wasting his speed. He slowed to take up his pace just behind the third man, Norris. Along the backstretch he opened up, passed Norris and slammed into high for the turn.

DIXON made his bid, pulled clear and then Link was striding just behind Hazen. He held it through the turn, then eased his teeth and tried to force his breathing to better control. But he knew, even as he did so, that his legs weren't really all his. His pace was coming apart, his stride faltering.

Gamely, he challenged Hazen, the roar of the stands a dim surf of sound in his pulsing ears. He was all even with Hazen when the latter made his lurching leap for the imaginary tape that Dixon had left when he breasted the real one.

Dixon, Hazen and Langer was the way it went into the records. Winner's time was 1:52.4.

Link got his breath, then trotted over to speak to Dixon.

"Nice race, keed." He tried to keep the surprise out of his voice, but wasn't entirely successful.

"Well, I didn't run the mile you did," the team captain said, his eyes very careful about it all. "And anyway, this is my distance. I run the mile because—well, someone's got to."

Link's face hardened.

"The good old Kingston spirit, huh? I guess you mean I should run the half, too."

"No, I don't." Dixon grinned slightly. "For my own personal satisfaction, I'd just as soon you didn't. We probably jockeyed you a bit and you're not used to the tactics of the half. I'm safer with you in the mile."

"Then you're safe," Link said. He went away to the dressing-rooms. Later, he looked up Lars Weaver and motioned that he wanted to speak to him in private.

"Lars, do you think I have a big head?"

The coach looked at him keenly.

"Why, no, Link. I don't."

"Then what was the idea of setting me up for that beating those two gave me?"

The coach shrugged.

"For conditioning. Timing. Maybe we'll crack that big mile by thinking in terms of a half, after we've run the first two quarters. Maybe you didn't realize it, but Dixon is a very, very good half-miler.

"If he'd save himself for the half, he could do even better. He could run maybe two seconds behind the record. As it was, you fellows were only three seconds behind it. That's good running."

"Dixon was only three seconds behind it," Link said. "Not me."

Weaver grinned.

"The way you ran, covering extra distance and all, you probably beat his time. Anything else, Link? I'm quite pleased with what you showed. It was good. Just try to make yourself think in terms of that half-

mile once you put the first two quarters away.

"Right, Coach. But no more, hey? No more half?"

"As I told you, you'll ask me. Be seein' you, Link."

Kingston sent a team to the Penn Relays, for the two-mile event. It took third. Joiness, Deacon, Ledbetter and Dixon ran it. Deacon was a two-minute man.

Had he been able to do 1:55, the team would have copped by a second.

Link looked Weaver up.

"I guess you are blaming me," he said.

The coach managed to look surprised.

"For what?"

"We didn't win the two-mile relay."

"You didn't even run, did you? How can I blame you?"

"What are you figuring me for in the dual meet against Navy?"

"The mile, naturally. Why? Won't you be able to run?"

Link sighed.

"Okay, Coach. Okay." He thought about it. "I hope conditions are perfect. No wind and clear. Gee!"

"I hope so, too," Weaver said evenly. "My jumpers and weight men don't do so well in muddy pits. How's it, Link, otherwise? I mean your heart? Okay?"

Link didn't even answer the man. He walked away frowning.

He was frowning when he looked out the window at the weather the morning of the Navy meet. It was the sort of weather you could see—in sheets. It stopped coming down by late morning, but not even a seal would have felt good on the sort of track it left.

Link swallowed his disappointment as best he could. He looked up Lars Weaver again.

"There isn't much chance of a decent mile today. Want me in the half, or the two-mile relay?" he asked.

The old coach hardly glanced at him.

"Maybe you didn't know, fella, but there's a sort of order about these things. They make entries of contestants, print programs, and so on. You're entered in the mile. "I told you to let me know if you wanted the half or the relay. But not just to suit your whim. I mean, just because the weather is bad, or something. Just stop worrying about me and you go win your mile. You'll have your work cut out for you!"

Link did. Darrier greeted him with a hard grin and a chuckle.

"What's the matter, buddy? Lose your best friend? Cheer up, I won't beat you too badly. Just give it the college try!"

LINK had to give it every try he knew. The burly midshipman lit out with the gun and skidded, slipped and splashed for three gruelling quarters just one step behind Link. The star of Kingston had to give it all he had to win by that same step in the stunning bad-track time of 4:12.6.

But Navy won the meet with points to spare.

And then came the grind for the Championship at Franklin Field in Philadelphia.

The team and the whole college took out its respective pencils and began figuring. But Navy always came out ahead by 10 points or so. Weaver didn't seem downhearted, though.

"They'll not even place in the high-jump, nor the running broad, and they were one-two in both here," he said. "We won't win those events, but neither will Navy."

Link pondered going to Weaver and asking him if he wanted him in the half or the relay. But the man's rebuke was still large in Link's mind, so he skipped it.

"I probably won't be here next year," he saw it. "So to heck with it."

But it was a glum lot that climbed into busses for the trip to Philadelphia and the time-trials for certain of the events. The usual parade of Old Grads visited the dressing-room and gave the usual pep-talks. Among them was Corman, former Kingston weightman and football immortal.

Corman saw Link, after he had made his talk, and came over to him.

"Oh, hello. I see you didn't take my advice."

"You don't own Kingston, do you? I found I didn't need your scholarship."

The big man looked at him evenly.

"That's good. Because right now I still wouldn't give you one." He scratched his nose. "Think you have any chance in the half?"

"How could I?" Link asked. "I'm not in the event."

"Huh?" the old grad looked at his program. "They have your name down here. Must be a mistake, eh? Well, good luck in the mile. You'll need it. Darrier is loaded for bear, I hear. Incidentally, in case you didn't know it, Ritchey is my nephew."

And he left.

Link looked up Weaver.

"You put me in the half?"

"As an alternate," the coach said. "And in the two-mile relay the same way. Ledbetter is sick. Anyway, you came chewing around about the half in the Navy meet, so I thought I'd better cover you, in case you figured you wouldn't have a chance at the four-minute mile. But you don't have to run, Link."

Link's eyes were flashing, but the coach's gaze was guileless. The miler walked away.

Link Langer, Darrier, Dixon, Mordaunt of Wisconsin and Kennard of Harvard made the five top mile qualifying times. Darrier topped them all with a blazing 4:07.6. Link contented himself with a good 4:15. Dixon clocked 4:25.

After a struggle with himself, Link went to Weaver.

"I'd like to try in the half, too, Coach," he said. "Okay?"

"Are you asking for it?" Weaver wanted to know. "I'm not."

"I'm asking for it," Link said. "I think I can beat a few of them. I should be better than I was in the Michigan meet, anyway."

"You didn't like Dixon beating you, did you? I know. It's okay with me, fella. Go to it. But—I'm not asking you."

Link qualified in 1:57 for the half, and the relay team made it handily for the finals. The team perked up and began figuring again—but it was still Navy by a few points. Even with Link first and Dixon fourth in the mile—which was doubtful—and with Dixon first in the half and the Link fourth it was close.

And then in the first dash event, Erlicher of Kingston fell and Kingston chances and spirits with him.

"Next year, maybe," Weaver sighed.

"Heck, we still have a chance," Dixon said. "We can still cop." But his heart wasn't in his words and they all knew it.

Link looked around at the morose gang of them, as he waited for the call to the mile finals. Some of them would finish this June, and would never have another chance. And neither would Kingston, maybe, for that matter.

LINK LANGER had never been one of the Kingston track team, really. Sure, he wore their colors. And to the public, he was *the* Kingston track team in spades. But Link had been a team man once, knew how they felt, what they felt. And the coach—Weaver had helped him lots.

"Aw heck," he muttered. But he looked around and found Weaver and Dixon. "I'd like to talk with you both. Okay?"

Dixon's eyes were curious, but Weaver was almost disinterested.

"Make it quick," the coach said. "I have to get outside."

"Coach, would we have a chance if we could make it one-two in the mile? And maybe the same way in the half?"

"What you been taking, Jap pep pills?" Weaver asked. "Are you going in for goofballs or suggesting that I do?"

"I'm serious," Link said. He looked at Dixon. "Can you run a timed four-twenty mile or maybe a shade better? If you can, I think maybe you have a chance." He grinned slightly. "Because I think I can beat you in the half or come so close to it that it'll be one-two."

"You darned fool," Weaver said, his eyes kindling. "You sure?"

"I think so," Link said. "You see, it's been so long now. He's never forgotten that first time. Get me? But if Dixon can run four-nineteen or so, or will make the try, I'm game to make *my* try. I've got to stage it just right so he won't wise up. But I'll gamble."

"What," Dixon asked, "is the double talk? Who'll try what?"

"Link thinks he can pull Darrier's cork by running out at a pace they neither of them can hold," Weaver cut in. "To time it so he is sure to come in *second to you*, at the worst. You run a *timed* race; and Link will try and decoy Darrier into following *his* pace."

"What about his try for the four-minute mile?" Dixon asked.

"Ask him," Weaver said. "I dunno."

"Aw heck," Link growled. "The weather isn't right and the track isn't as good as it is at Kingston. How about it?"

"If you miss, we haven't a chance," Dixon said. "You know that. Maybe we shouldn't gamble."

"If you don't try it, we haven't a chance," Weaver said. "But the gamble is all Link's. You have nothing to lose, Dixon."

The team captain stared at the coach, then at Link.

"Have you talked this over with anyone else at all, Link? Just the slightest suspicion—"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Link countered.

Dixon grinned faintly.

"So long as you ask me, yes! Quite crazy. But it's the sort of nuttiness I go for. You've made a sale, Link. Gee, I hope I can do it!"

"You'll get your ears pinned back if you miss," Link said flatly. "Well, I'm going out and warm up. See you both out there."

They were off at the crack of the gun with Darrier and Langer going hard for the lead spot. And as always, excepting that once back in their high-school days, it was Link who grabbed the lead. Darrier fell in a pace behind and clung grimly.

Link calculated a 60-second first quarter would be fast, very fast—about the same as Cunningham's when he ran with 4:04.4 record at Hanover. Too, it wasn't so fast that Darrier's suspicions would be aroused.

When they crested the starting point, they were working like automatons. The second quarter should have been a decided drop-off, but Link held to his stride, counting on Darrier to follow close in his wake. Darrier had followed this clever pace-setter so religiously for so many years that it should have become ingrained habit.

The second quarter was clocked in the staggering time of 0:58, and a murmur of comment started in the stands, grew to a roar when the crowd realized this first half-mile had been stepped in 1:58. If the runners out in front held an even 1:60 pace, or slightly worse, the four-minute mile was at hand.

Link, running steadily and with the pad-pad-pad of Darrier's racing feet in his ears, only let himself think of that proposition briefly. Then slowly, imperceptibly, he flowed the pace on and carried Darrier with him. When he breasted the third quarter mile, the roar of the crowd told him the facts—that it was the fastest three-quarters ever run on the way of the mile measure.

STEADILY he held to it, but the strain was beginning to tell. His breath was coming in gouts. He held to it up along the backstretch—and then he made his bid coming around the turn for the last sprint.

Things were beginning to black out before his eyes, so that the infield and the stands were wide-eyed, wide-mouthed heads that grew in the air, bodiless, formless, floating in that sea of sound. Here was where the sprint should have been poured on. But there was no thought of sprint in Link's befogged mind now.

"Hang on, hang on!" he told himself grimly. "Hang on even if you finish in a walk! Hang on! Hang . . . on . . . !"

All the world was sound and blurred faces. That and something moving close to his elbow, holding there, going past—and then he was stumbling, was falling, was managing to pick up and go on again. Just a few yards more—just a few yards more!

Then he couldn't run and was walking. He didn't know he was walking feebly, drunkenly, past the finish-line. But he did know when arms caught him, eased him down on the grass in the infield.

And he knew when they carried him into the dressing-room.

He lay on the rubbing-table and whiffed the salts again and looked anxiously at Weaver. "The man that passed me? Was it—Darrier? Was it Chuck?"

The coach shook his head.

"Darrier didn't finish. He fell, poor fella. He stumbled. That was Dixon. Think you can make it for the relay? We'll pass up the half, son."

"Heck," Link said. He looked past the coach and saw others of the team and Corman and Dixon. He looked at Dixon.

"Hey, Ritchey!" He grinned. "Congratulations to the new mile champ! Nice going!"

"You darned liar!" Dixon said. "You told me all I had to do was four-twenty, or four-nineteen. Heck, I'm shot, boy! I had to make four-thirteen to take that crazy race! But thanks, Link! *Gee,* thanks!"

"Aw, shut up," Link murmured. "It was for the team, Ritchey."

Corman came close. "About that scholarship—" he said.

"Say no more," Link groaned. "If you think I'm turning it down, you're crazy. I can use the extra time for conditioning. Anyway, the way I'm going in chemistry, I expect I'll nearly earn one."

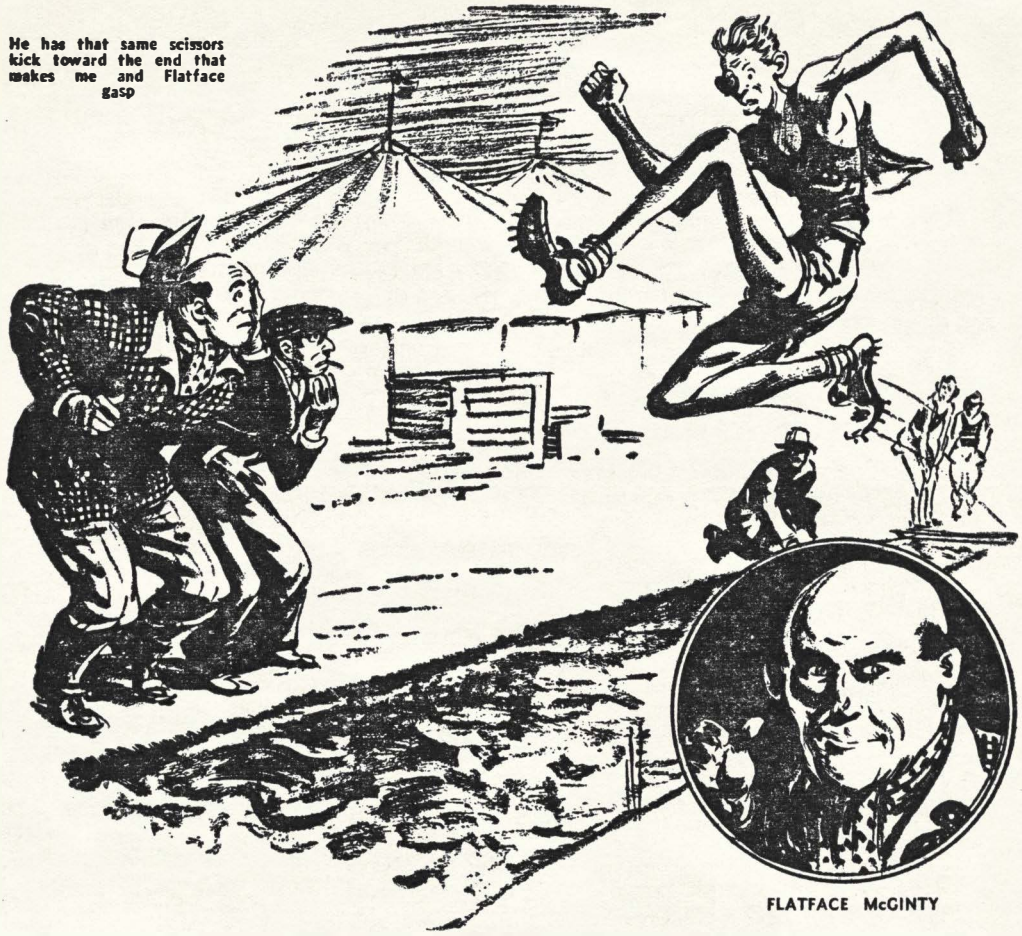
"Save your breath," Weaver told him flatly. "Now, listen, *Champ!* How are you? How's your heart? Huh?"

Link looked at him, felt the strength flow back into his body as he lay there.

"I think it's all right," he said. "It's okay."

"I know it is," the coach said softly. "Just as all Kingston does, by now! Or will soon! Rest up, now, because we still have places to go."

"Poor Ritchey," Link grinned. "I'm going to beat him in the half!"



BROAD JUMP BONANZA

By RICHARD BRISTER

When McGinty learns that his phenomenal broad jumping find is strictly a puddle jumper, he digs a puddle—and hits paydirt!

IF IT isn't for our jalopy having a clogged gas line, me and Flatface McGinty can very easily fail to discover Pogo Moses. We are rattling along a macadam road which has more bumps per square foot than a washboard, when the coupe's engine starts coughing like a fat man with asthma.

I pull over into the gutter. McGinty grabs the pliers out of the glove compartment and raises the hood, making a face which will shame Boris Karloff into playing juvenile parts in his next six pictures.

"I am getting sick and tired of usin' meself fer a suction pump to clean out that gas line," says McGinty, scowling. "I got gas on me stomach. Hey—" he sniffs the air like a hound dog catching the scent of a rabbit, "—you smell what I smell, do ya, Monk?"

I shove my head out the coupe's window. "You mean the fresh air, Flatface?"

"Beef," says McGinty. "Barbecue beef."

He drops the pliers like they was burning his mitt, sniffs some more, and then starts walking across a hayfield toward a thick clump of trees.

"Somebody's roasting beef over there in them woods where that crick cuts through the valley," he says, lickin' his chops. "I don't know about you, Monk, but me, I could go through about half a cow, the way me stomach's rumblin'."

It has been somewhat longer than long enough since me and Flatface have eat anything but coffee and sinkers, being as we ain't crowding Rockefeller none in the cash division. So when Flatface cuts down through them trees at a double-time jogtrot, I'm climbing his heels.

The smell of that roasting beef is riding a gentle breeze through them trees, and my stomach is jumping and my nose is twitching.

"Maybe it's a picnic," I say, gulping. "It's Sunday afternoon, and these Minnesota farmers go in pretty strong for—holy sufferin' catfish, Flatface, what's that crazy-lookin' galoot gonna do down there?"

We are just coming over a little rise, and from where we stand, we can look down at a little green grove alongside a stream. It is a farmers' picnic grounds, sure enough. There is a hind quarter turning on a spit over a big open fire, and the smell of that roasting meat is enough to choke me and Fatface on our own saliva.

But what I'm looking at hardest is not the food, but a tall, bag-eared farm kid who is crouched down in a runner's starting position, facing that creek. The picnic crowd is lined up in two long rows between Bag Ears and the stream, making a kind of a runway for him, and while I stand there gulping, the skinny kid starts running straight toward the water.

McGINTY turns his bashed-in face toward me. McGinty once puts in a three-year trick catching gloves in his face, and there is no way to describe what is left of his features except to say they look like crumpled paper.

"Looks like he means t' jump in the water. Unless—" McGinty scratches his bald spot, "—unless he figures to jump clear acrost. But I don't reckon that's likely. Must be way over twenty foot, an' he can't get up no real speed on that bumpy ground. I don't figure even a champion broad jumper'd make it."

"Lissen, let's scram outta here, Flatface. Then hicks down there have a kind of queer look about 'em. I ain't as hungry as I—"

"Whup! Lookit that screwball go!" chirps McGinty.

I'm looking. I can't help looking. That big, skin-and-bone kid is something to see. He's picking up steam and speed with every stride, and he comes up to the bank of the creek like a plane taking off from a flat-top. He's so thin and spindle-shanked that he runs kind of awkward and jerky, like he's so feather-light he can't hardly keep from taking off with each step and just floating up through the trees like a toy balloon.

He slaps his left foot down hard on the creek bank and goes sailing far out over the water. The crowd closes in behind to watch how he makes out, and some of the kids hanging onto their mother's skirts begin to whoop and holler at the strange spectacle of it.

Three quarters of the way over the water, Bag Ears begins to fall, and I say, "Maybe he meant to jump clear acrost, but he's a gone gosling now. Holy smoke, lookit that scissors kick, will ya?"

I never see such a pretty kick as that farm kid demonstrates down there over the water. His lean legs flutter past each other, quick and hard as a mule trying to kick a hole in his stall. He gets a lot of "secondary lift," as I once hear a college track coach call it, out of that leg thrust. He gains a clean foot in height, and just seems to spread wings and glide the rest of the way to that opposite bank.

I look at Flatface McGinty and Flatface looks at me, and our Adam's Apples bob out and say hello to each other.

"Go back to the jalop," I tell him, "an' get the measurin' tape. I think we struck gold, Flatface. I'll go down and start casing the set-up."

Me and Flatface McGinty make what we laughingly call our living by combing the hinterlands for athletic talent. A lot of new colleges are bobbing up all over the country, what with the G. I. Bill of Rights giving such a shot in the arm to the sheepskin business. And these new colleges, and some of the old, are on the lookout for athletes. Flatface and me've got a list of coaches who know it takes money to make money, or winning teams.

When we find a hot basketball forward, or a champion shot putter, or a star baseball

pitcher, we pass the word on to our list of coaches, and sell our find to the highest bidder. Last spring we found a hot distance runner down in the wilds of Missouri, a mountain boy who'd never run a timed race in his life, but who just ran for the fun of it.

Barney Simms paid us five C's for the kid, and now the kid's burning the cinders up for Barney at Midwest—and getting himself a free education. Barney has the athletic council in the palm of his hand, and the alumni one-hundred-percent behind him. We probably could of gotten more than five C's for that kid, but we didn't want to put the pressure on Barney, because he buys a lot of boys from us.

But it is months since he bought that last boy, and me and Flatface are feeling the pinch. Which is why I am excited to see Bag Ears sail over that wide creek like a bird, and why I sent Flatface back for the measuring tape. Barney Simms will pay through the nose, for a hot broad jumper.

I scramble down to the grove and grab hold of a farmer's sleeve.

"What's the deal here?" I ask him. "How'd that skinny kid ever learn to pull off such a jump?"

I'm lucky. It turns out I've tagged the kid's father. He beams, proud-like, and in two minutes I have the whole story. It seems they have these picnics regular, all through the summer. The women compete with their cooking, the old men pitch horseshoes, but that ain't exciting enough for the young fellas.

The creek keeps gettin' wider and wider as it moves down past the grove, and a couple years back the boys started jumping over the narrow spots for fun, and to show off to their girls a little. It worked up to a kind of a game, and they'd all take turns, jumping across at wider and wider places, until everybody'd got a wet foot and had to drop out but the winner.

"Pogo's won it every time this year," says the kid's father. "That boy just seemed to develop springs in his legs, all of a sudden." He grins. "That's how come folks started callin' him Pogo. Looks like he's on a pogo stick when he runs . . . my name's Moses."

"Avery," I tell him. "Monk Avery."

We're pumping hands when Flatface shows up with the tape, and then the rube kid comes up himself, having jumped back over a narrower part of the stream. A curious crowd comes around to examine me and Flatface, us bein' slickers, but I don't pay no attention. I'm studying young Mr. Pogo Moses.

HE'S one of these slack-jawed kids, with his mouth hanging open like he's packing oversize tonsils. His eyes look kind of vacant, and I don't guess he wins many spelling bees or A's on his report card. The bag ears don't add nothing much to the over-all scenery, but if he ain't Einstein, what of it? Barney Simms knows how to nurse his boys through the snap courses at Midwest. He ain't had a boy flunked out on him yet.

I make my voice friendly. "How old are you, Pogo?"

"Why—huh-h-h—I guess I'm nineteen." Like that. I'm not kidding. Mortimer Snerd, in the flesh.

I'm wincing, but nobody sees it. I'm afraid to look at Flatface, so I stare hard at the rube kid.

"Did you go to high school?"

"Huh-h-h-h — yup. Just — huh-h-h—finished in June."

"All right, Mort—I mean, Pogo. Now, look, would you like to find out how far you just jumped? My friend McGinty has a steel tape here, and if you'll get over there on the other side, we can stretch it from bank to bank and see what it measures."

"Huh-h-h-h—what fer?"

I look at him hard, thinking he *must* be gagging. But those vacant eyes wouldn't know a gag from a bag of potatoes.

"So you'll know how far you jumped," I say, patient.

"Huh-h-h-h—who cares? Never got m' feet wet none. Don't reckon the crick's gonna git no wider, less'n it floods. An' that there ain't likely. Don't—huh-h-h—don't see what fer you'd wanta measure. Huh-h-h-h."

He gapes around at the crowd, that slack jaw hanging down like a scoop shovel. And since he's the man of the hour, the crick-jumping champion, the rubes greet his remarks with chuckles.

I know when I'm licked. There's a footbridge down stream a ways. I walk down, over the bridge, and upstream again to the spot where Pogo makes his record jump. I cup my hands and yell to Flatface.

"Unroll that tape and toss me the case end of it." He does, and the crowd mills around him while we're stretching the tape out.

Flatface yells. "How about it, Monk?"

I'm staring down at the numbers, and I get a dizzy spell that almost dumps me head-over-heels in the water. "T-twenty-two, six," I stutter. "Holy cow, F-Flatface! That's five sure points in any small college meet. And with no cinder runway for his approach, and no takeoff board! Holy moses!"

That scoop-jawed rube is standing across the stream, staring dully at me.

"Huh-h-h-h—what you gittin' so all-fired steamed up about, mister?"

"Listen, Pogo, how'd you like to get a four-year course in college for nothing? An education worth thousands, and all the fun that goes with it?"

"Huh-h-h-h—you mean—"

His old man cuts in. "Jest what're you drivin' at, Mr. Avery?"

I tell him. The old man's chest puffs out some, and he looks around to see if he's making an impression with his neighbors.

"I had a cousin went to one of them colleges t' git eddicated, an' he swears by it. Don't see where it'll hurt none to have another college man in the family. Y' say, jest fer jumpin' some, in the spring months?"

"That's right," I say, giving him a big nod.

"Huh-h-h-h—I ain't much fer studyin' figures an' poetry an' such-like," puts in the goof. "If they was a course in farmin', where I could learn about fertilizer an' crop rotatin', an' diff'rent soil, an' what-all—"

"The place I have in mind," I tell him, "is Midwest College. Noted for its agriculture courses."

"Huh-h-h-h—shucks, Pop—" the goof glances at the old man sideways—"ya reckon maybe I should oughta?"

"Don't figger you'd oughta turn it down," the old man says, and wags his head gravely. "'Twon't make us short-handed at the farm, I don't reckon. You go on ahead, son, and git y'self edified all you can. They's lots of newfangled tricks t' be learnt about farmin'."

The goof grins, and I'm grinning along with him, and winking at Flatface. I'm already composing a telegram to Barney Simms down at Midwest, and wondering how much we ought to charge him, for a twenty-two and a half foot broad jumper.

But Barney's reply to our wire is cautious.

SURE I CAN USE A BROAD JUMPER STOP SUPPOSE YOU PUT YOUR CRICK JUMPER IN A MEET AND SEE HOW HE MAKES OUT IN COMPETITION STOP PROVE TO ME THAT HE'S REALLY GOT IT AND I'LL PAY YOU GUYS PLENTY

Ten days later me, Flatface McGinty, and Pogo Moses rattle into the fair grounds of the neighboring county. The place is crowded with farmers and their families, in for the doings. The schedule of entertainment events includes a track meet, and the name of Pogo Moses heads the list of competitors in the broad jump.

THERE is five men entered, and there ain't but one of 'em has a real track suit. He looks pretty good, takin' his warm-up jumps.

"There's the fella you'll haveta beat," I say to Pogo. "He's sailin' out there for plenty yards over that sawdust. This ain't his first crack at broad jumpin'."

"Huh-h-h-h—" the rube gapes at me "—'tain't mine neither, Mr. Av'ry. I ain't ascairt of 'im."

"Warm up a little. You got to win today, an' chalk up a good distance, so's it'll get in the newspaper write-ups an' we can send the clipping to Barney Simms." I nod to Flatface. "Come on, let's measure his stride mark out for him."

Flatface holds the tape against the take-off board and I walk the zero end back along the runway. While we stay out at the Moses farm, waitin' for this meet to come up, we have worked out the kid's best distance for his runnin' approach, an' the stride mark he has to hit at the end of the runway, in order to come into the board at full speed and hit it just right with his left foot.

I jab a stick in the grass alongside of the cinder pathway and nod at Pogo.

"All right, kid. Hit this mark with your left foot and run through it once."

He runs down there with his jerky, leg-flapping stride, hits the board just right, and then swerves off and coasts to a stop alongside of the pit. I'm grinning. So far, so good.

"All right, take a practice jump, Pogo."

Me and Flatfoot watch him careful, because we ain't seen him take a real jump since we watch him sail over that creek. We work out his stride mark on the dirt road that leads to the Moses farmhouse, but we don't risk lettin' him jump on hard ground, for fear he'll twist one of them pencil-size ankles.

He comes kitin' down the cinders, hits the board neat as a pin, and glides out over the

sawdust. He comes down pretty fast, and me and Flatface look at each other and wince. We stretch the tape from the board to where he digs a hole in the sawdust, and it's eighteen feet, even.

I feel like a billygoat hits me head-on where I carry my lunch. Flatface is shaking his bald head from side to side, and won't look at me.

"Lissen, you gotta do better," I growl at the rube. "A whole lot better, if you want to get educated."

"Huh-h-h-h—wa'n't that a good one, Mr. Av'ry?"

I'm still giving him my personal opinion on that subject when the official calls out his name. They're getting the event started right on time, and Pogo's up first.

He comes flapping down toward the pit, looking like nothing human, and rips off a beautiful jump of eighteen feet, three inches. The next man up is the ringer, the only one in the meet with a genuine track suit, and the guy goes sailing out past twenty-one feet.

I grab Pogo's arm before his second jump, and talk turkey to him.

"Listen, put some stuff in it. You went twenty-two, six, when you won that crick-jumping contest. And here you got much better conditions to jump in. You ain't gonna let that stuck-up guy trim you. Or are you?"

"Huh-h-h-h—I wisht I had him out jumpin' cricks, Mr. Av'ry. I'd show him."

"You show him right here an' now, dang it! You've only got three jumps, an' you've poured one down the sink already."

I can see he tries. He puts stuff in it, but he still plops down too fast, and rips a hole in the sawdust out around nineteen feet. Which is good, for a sophomore in high school, but which never wins him no college course worth thousands of dollars.

The ringer goes just short of twenty-two feet for his second. I talk to the fellow and find out he's already graduated from college, whereupon I lose all professional interest in him.

I tell Pogo, "He's laughing at you, kid. Now put some steam in it, this last try. You can jump circles around that guy, if you'll make a real effort."

"All right, Mr. Av'ry. I'll—huh-h-h-h—I'll show 'em."

I can see he's really tryin', because for the first time in his life, he has that scoop-shovel chin of his clamped tight shut, on the way down the cinders. He hits the board hard with his left foot, and my heart pounds my ribs like a hammer, because it's all up for me and Flatface McGinty, if the rube flubs out on this one.

He gets some nice height, and he has that same scissors kick toward the end that makes me and Flatface gasp the first time we see him sailing over that creek.

I'm biting my lip, thinking this time he's got it. Then he comes down like there's lead in him, and it measures just short of twenty feet.

I look at Flatface McGinty.

"Well," I shrug, "at least we got fattened up some, stayin' out at the farmhouse. I don't get it, Flatface. We couldn't—you don't s'pose we measured wrong, that day?"

"You read the tape, Monk," McGinty sighs. "Look, I'm gonna wander around at the midway. I done some time in the carnies, fightin' all comers. I might just bump into somebody down there that I knew in the old days. Say, for instance—" McGinty grins "—some jasper that owes me money. Meet you at the main gate around seven tonight. All right?"

He goes, and I'm stuck with the kid, Pogo Moses.

"Listen, kid, there must be *some* reason you didn't get your distance."

"Huh-h-h-h—I ain't never jumped in that there sawdust afore, Mr. Av'ry. On'y just acrost cricks. Don't seem the same, somehow."

"You mean, not having the water there? You miss the threat of getting your feet wet?"

"Huh-h-h-h—I reckon." He turns those vacant eyes on me.

WELL, it makes sense, at that. He's trained himself to jump over water, and that constant threat of a ducking, as the result of failure, would be a driving incentive. The goof doesn't give a hoot about our measuring the distance he jumps that first day, when he sails over the stream. He ain't too long on brain power or imagination, but give him a creek to jump over, something tangible to aim at, and he piles into it the same way he'd pile into a corn-husking contest.

I say, "If you'd try to *imagine* a crick between that take-off board an' some spot far out on the sawdust, Pogo—"

"Huh-h-h-h—that there's silly. Can't see

water where there ain't none. Huh-h-h-h—wisht you'd teach that there trick to the cattle. Save me an' Pop a lotta trouble when it comes time t' water 'em down in the evenin'."

We meet McGinty at the main gate at seven, and I head the jalop back toward the farm.

"Meet anybody you knew?" I ask Flatface, and he lifts up both hands with all fingers outstretched, meaning he has found an old carnival friend, and it nets him ten dollars. So we don't starve for awhile yet.

I tell Flatface what Pogo tells me. McGinty has tin ears and bells in his head from his days in the ring, but while his brains may be somewhat scrambled, they are not down for the ten-count. He scratches his bald spot and scowls at himself in the windshield.

"The jasper that gimme the ten spot," he says, "tells me they're movin' to another fair in the next county, for a whole week. That'll mean another track meet, bein' these meets are a regular part o' the program."

"So?"

"So the kid goes again," says Flatface McGinty." "Only this time he has learned to jump without that water beneath him. It's a matter of practice. I never learnt to throw a right hook overnight, lemme tell you."

It is a question whether Flatface ever learnt to throw a right hook, but I do not stop him to debate this now.

"In the mornin', Monk, you an' me'll grab a coupla shovels, and dig him a jumpin' pit out back o' the barn. We already seen the kid jump twenny-two, six, ain't we? By the end o' the week, I'll bet he'll do purty near that much into our practice pit. And if need be," adds McGinty, with a grin, "we'll have a bucket brigade, an' fill up the front half of that pit with well water, just to help Pogo get the idea."

I watch the macadam unwind like a black conveyor belt underneath the jalop.

"McGinty," I say, with feeling, "I could kiss you."

"Huh-h-h-h—that there's dumb," puts in Pogo Moses. "McGinty ain't no girl."

"McGinty," I tell him, "is a genius."

Toward the end of the week, I ain't so certain. We near bust our backs digging out a pit for the kid, like Flatface suggests, and a good part of that ten spot McGinty gets from his old carny pal goes out to buy sawdust.

We work the kid like a truck horse out there in back of the barn, Monday and Tuesday. And while he shows some improvement, it ain't so much that we're turning handsprings for joy. He goes past twenty a couple of times. But the meet comes on Saturday, and it don't look like he's improving fast enough to impress Barney Simms, so we dig out the sawdust in the front half of the pit, and fill it with water, like Flatface McGinty suggests.

So that fool kid jumps twenty-two foot without even trying, which proves, sure enough, it's the water he's been missing. So then we fill in the water hole with sawdust, and right away, he drops back around twenty.

I am all for hopping into the heap, about them fair grounds early, so as I can visit in human form, that scoop-jawed Pogo Moses. But McGinty talks me out of it, and Friday morning he tells me:

"I am going to hop a bus and get over to them fair grounds early, so as I can visit with some more of me old carny friends, and so forth. I'll see you an' Pogo tomorrow afternoon at the broad jumpin' pit, Monk. An' in the meantime, let's all be prayin'."

"Prayin'?" I stare at him. "What for?"

"For rain," says Flatface McGinty. "What else?"

Sometimes I wonder who done time as a leather pusher, and whose brains got scrambled, me or McGinty? Up to now I haven't give a thought to that angle.

I spend most of Friday huggin' old man Moses' ten-tube Atwater Kent, chasin' down weather reports. First off it's all pretty disgusting, all "fair and warmer" predictions, but around two in the morning, the picture changes somewhat, when I hear a "cloudy, with occasional light showers" forecast. I go to bed and dream that a cloudburst sweeps down from Canada, makes a regular lake out of the broad jump pit out at that fair ground, and Pogo jumps across it for a new world's record.

I'm up with the roosters in the morning. It's sort of cloudy out, but it don't look like that dream I been dreaming all night, over and over. Me and Pogo hop in the heap and rattle off toward them fair grounds early. I see we're headin' into some pretty dark-lookin' clouds, but the sun's still fighting through them pretty fair, when we get out on the field and find McGinty waitin' there for us.

I wave at them low clouds drifting over

our heads.

"Whatta ya think, McGinty?"

"Why," he says, "we may get some rain. I been up most of the night with an old pal o' mine, who does a stunt act. Dives off of a fifty foot tower into a tub of water, so to speak. He's a—"

"Listen, McGinty, concentrate on prayin' for rain, will ya? You realize this thing's about to get started. Start warmin' up, Pogo." I am in no mood to waste time chinning about this high diving character McGinty mentions.

I WALK over to the jumping pit, with McGinty behind me, and stare down disgustedly at the sawdust. The pit is a pretty makeshift affair, the runway is half covered with weeds, and the take-off board is stained brown from being out in the weather all winter. The pit is dug nice and deep, but it's short. The far end of it don't look more than twenty-three feet from the take-off board.

"Some plant," I scowl at Flatface McGinty. "Jesse Owens'd jump clean acrost it and land in the grass. But it'd fill up nice in a rainstorm, Flatface. A good rain'd turn it into a real nice puddle." I shoot an anxious glance at the sky, and the sun sneers down at me.

McGinty says, "Like I was sayin', Monk, I been up all night with this old pal of mine, this stunt diver, an'—"

"Forget that, McGinty." I'm feeling impatient. "I can't think of nothin' but rain. If we'd just get a good hard downpour, our troubles would be over."

"This guy that does the stunt divin—"

"Here comes Pogo!"

He romps down the line, hits the board hard, and sails out there about twenty feet. Some of the other kids take warm-up jumps, and two of them get out there past Pogo's mark.

It's clouding up more by this time, and I'm wondering how I can stall the officials awhile, till that rain comes. But I can't think up any gag that stands a chance of turning the trick, and the first thing I know the event's under way, and the kid's romping down toward the pit for his first official jump.

He gets out and up there. But there's just no getting around the fact that he still needs water underneath him, to turn in a record. He goes out twenty foot and a half, which

[*Turn page*]

ain't to be sneezed at, but which don't earn us no five hundred iron men from Barney Simms neither.

The next fellow up goes out for a neat twenty-one. I glance at McGinty, disgusted. "Sometimes, McGinty, I almost wonder if we hadn't ought to try goin' to work for a livin'. D'you smell rain, or am I wishful thinkin'?"

McGinty sniffs the air. "We'll get a nice little shower in a few more minutes, I figure," he says, and shrugs. " 'Course, it'll take more'n just a light shower to fill that pit up with water, I guess. Like I was sayin', Monk, about this pal o' mine that does the stunt divin'—"

"Will you forget that guy for a minute, McGinty?" I feel something wet spatter against my wrist, and I forget all about being irritated with Flatface McGinty's one-track mind.

"Hey! It's rainin'! Boy! Now, if it'll just rain hard enough, Flatface!"

"It ain't doin' bad," says McGinty, and makes a beeline for the ramshackle wood grandstand. He goes in under one end, and I lose sight of him, in there behind the tiers of bench seats.

He says it ain't doing bad, but it's like the radio says—just a light shower. My coat gets speckled with wet spots, and I pull down my hat brim, but it'll take four hours of this kind of drizzling to make a pool out of that jumping pit.

I swear at McGinty for lettin' a little rain chase him under the grandstand, desertin' our colors, and I glue my eyes on Pogo, who's ready to race down the line for his second jump.

The spindle-shanked goof knows how much depends on his performance today, and he's trying, plain enough. He goes out twenty one feet, which is improving on what he does last week. But I still ain't dancing no jig about it.

The rain settles down to a medium drizzle. I figure there's no hope there. So I grab the kid and walk him out on the grass, and give him an old-fashioned pep talk.

He says, "Huh-h-h-h—I'll sure try, Mr. Av'ry. If it was on'y a crick-jumpin' contest, why I'd be the champeen."

"It ain't" I rasp at him. "All right. The others have taken their second cracks at it. So you're up for your last jump. Now, get some kick into it."

"Huh-h-h-h—all righty," he tells me. But his jaw droops and his mouth looks like a cave entrance, and his eyes are like oysters. I might as well of give a pep talk to a stone, I realize, and I'm mentally saying goodbye to that five hundred smackers.

He walks back to the end of the runway. I walk over alongside of the pit, and then I'm staring down at it, gasping. You'd never think it to judge from the slow way it's raining, but that pit's filled up right to the edges. There's specks of sawdust riding on top of the muddy water, and it has the general look of a pig sty.

I see one of the officials shaking his head.

"I don't understand it," he says. "I officiated here last year and the year before, and I remember it rained out here in '40. But the pit never filled up like this. Maybe we'd ought to postpone the event. We can't ask them to jump into that water."

"Now," I says quick, "now, wait up a minute. At least let this boy take his third jump. I don't figure he's gonna jump into nothing!"

THE official looks down the runway. Pogo is just starting his run down the line toward us. The official seems doubtful, and looks like he's going to yell out a warning to Pogo, tell him to stop.

"Let him come," I chirp, fast. "It ain't goin' to hurt him!"

Well, the guy is grinning, because nobody can help grinning watching Pogo's funny hopping stride down that cinder pathway. The kid has his scoop-jaw clamped shut, and he's wearing the grimmest expression I ever see in my life. He really means to go all the way out, this time, and then I see something that makes me want to cut out my heart and feed it to the beavers for breakfast.

He has his eyes down on the track, and then he focuses them hard on that board. He hits it like he's trying to stamp a hole in the ground, clear through to China, and then he clamps both his eyes shut and goes sailing out there without even knowing he's jumping over that God-sent pool of water.

I hear about athletes shutting their eyes when they are trying too hard, in this and that sport, but I never figure the kid will do it. At least, not at a fool time like this.

"Look out!" I bark at him, loud as I know how to bellow.

Well, it all happens in about one tenth of a second. He ain't bright, that kid, but he's

human. He opens his eyes, and he sees what's underneath him, and just like that—he's back jumping cricks. It's a case of getting clear past that pit, or getting his tootsies dunked, and that kid puts on the most amazing gymnastic performance I ever lay eyes on.

I'm still not forgetting the scissors kick he comes through with the first time me and McGinty see him, jumping that stream. But that don't hold no candle to the kick he shows this trip. His legs flutter under him fast as a humming bird's wings, and I can't even see what goes on from the waist down.

It's like watching an airplane's propellor spinning. You know it's there, but that's all. You can't see it. I *can* see what a big lift he gets out of those kicks, though. His head rises up more than a foot, and for the second time, I get the impression I'm watching a man sprout invisible wings and glide like a bird.

He glides clear across that water-filled pit and lands ker-plunk on the hard ground at the other end of it.

The crowd yells like crazy, not quite

[*Turn page*]

understanding how the kid did it. I thump Pogo hard on the back, and he almost stumbles into the grass. We both go over to watch the official put the measuring tape to it, and then I'm whooping like a wild man.

"Twenty-three, seven! Holy smoke, kid, you'd've won the National A. A. U. with that jump!"

"Huh-h-h-h—I done good, hey?"

McGinty comes running out from under the grandstand, and I lace into him some for running out on the party. I tell him we will starve to death, for all he seems to care. He takes it with a slow smile, and it isn't until we are on the way down to the telegraph office to wire Barney Simms that McGinty explains what he does under that grandstand while our future rides in the balance.

"Like I was tryin' to tell you, Monk, I am up most of the night with this old pal of mine that does the stunt divin'. He carries a long length of garden hose to fill up the tank he dives into. Last night, me and him dig a tunnel from the pit to the water line under the grandstand. We hook up the hose to the faucet, run it acrost to the pit, bury it and sod it over so it won't look like nothing funny's been goin' on.

"I hear the radio say it will probably rain, just like you do, Monk. But I don't count on a cloudburst. So the minute it starts to drizzle, I go under the grandstand and turn on that faucet."

I'm staring at him.

"No wonder the official couldn't understand how the pit filled up so fast!"

"What he don't know," says Flatface McGinty, "won't hurt him. In the meantime, the kid jumps like a champion, it is sure to get in the papers, we send the clipping to Barney Simms, he sends us a fat check, and that old wolf dies on our doorstep."

I'm feeling fine. The kid will learn to jump just as good with or without water beneath him, when he gets in enough hours of practice. So we ain't really short-changing Barney, I figure. I look at McGinty's bashed-in face. "McGinty, I love you," I say. "And if you ask me, that wolf *drowns* on our doorstep!"

THRILLS IN SPORTS

(Concluded from page 70)

muffler around his throat, and started out. The cold struck into his bones. The snow battered against his face. Seven miles is a long way and his feet were heavy. Jack wanted that bottle. He must get it.

There is no moral to this, really. They were just a couple of old men, who had wasted their youth in drunkenness and extravagance. But they owned the one quality of loyalty. Tom struggled on against the wind and the snow . . . the bottle in his pocket.

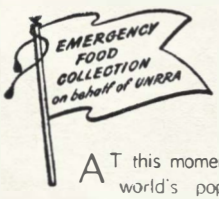
Seven miles—it took him hours. When Sullivan staggered into the poorhouse, he was near exhaustion. His face and ears and hands were badly frost-bitten.

"I brought Jack's bottle," he mumbled. "It wouldn't be Christmas for him without it."

He had carried out his task—he died a week later.

The pioneers of baseball—like the pioneers in many a wilderness—were rough, hard men. Most of them wasted the little they earned, drank heavily, came to sad ends. But, most of them were loyal as Tom Sullivan was, in carrying out an obligation—even though that obligation was no more than taking a bottle to an old man in the poorhouse.

WILL YOU GIVE THAT THEY MAY LIVE?



AT this moment a quarter of the world's population is facing death from sheer starvation. Diseases caused by malnutrition are taking a heavy toll in human lives.

The Emergency Food Collection, now under way throughout the United States on behalf of UNRRA, seeks contributions in the form of food in tin cans plus money with which to buy food. Every penny collected will be used to purchase food.

This is your opportunity to make a direct and personal contribution to help save lives of war victims overseas. Food will be distributed free, without discrimination, on the basis of greatest need.

Food collection depots have been established in every local community. Checks and money orders may also be sent to national headquarters of the Emergency Food Collection, 100 Maiden Lane, New York 7, N. Y.

THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 6)

makes for fine newspaper copy and spirited fan conversation everywhere.

Personally, your Cap is looking forward to the Olympics with anticipation and a pair of brass knuckles in his pants pocket.

While we are on the subject of international sport, here is an interesting letter from England on the subject.

CHEERIO!

by RAF Corporal Arthur "Ginger" Thomas

Dear Cap: As an old International Rugby Football player, I can quite understand what good will and sportsmanship mean. I have seen many examples of the same. However, I have also seen many acts of bad sportsmanship in my time, but such are best left behind.

You express everything in your clean-reading magazine, which is always thrilling, interesting and sporting. Such publications are all too few in this old world today. I have missed THRILLING SPORTS very much since my American buddies have gone away from my camp.

It would be doing me a very great favor if you would ask some of your readers in the United States if they would care to send me some of their old copies of your magazine at my home address. I can tell you it helps to pass many a lonely hour whilst I am still in camp.

If at any time I can do anything in return, please let me know and I will be at your immediate service. I will close now, wishing you and your readers all the best and sincerely hope some of them will send me some back copies. —*10 Firth Grove, Beeston, Leeds, Yorkshire, England.*

A grand letter, Ginger, and let's hope its publication here gets you those copies you want! The Cap would like to do his bit too, but it is impossible for us to supply back numbers.

If you were a Rugby International, you must have been considerable of an athlete yourself. For those fans who do not know what the game is about, here is a very rough idea.

Rugby is a game a lot more active and stamina-demanding than American football, since it is played in two 45-minute halves with only a five-minute rest period between. Furthermore, as in soccer or basketball, there is no time out between plays. It is no game for short-winded people.

Players wear only shirts and shorts, without pads of any kind, and tackling is not only allowed but is rugged. Substitutions are not permitted. If any of the fifteen players on a side breaks a leg or fractures a skull, his mates must simply carry on, a man short. A successful dropkick frequently made on the dead run) counts more than what we call a touchdown.

Rugby players consider our football

players sissies of the first water—and with some reason, though our game is plenty rough in its own staccato way.

A SOFTER GAME

by Gerald Major

Dear Cap: When are you or your authors going to run something about America's most popular outdoor sport? Yes, I am speaking of softball. You may not know it, but reliable estimates figure that more than half a million teams with almost ten million players will engage in 5,000,000 games on 10,000 diamonds before an audience larger than the population of the United States.

A lot of gym livers are touting basketball, and the alley cats root for bowling, but I don't see how either of these indoor games can come up to this. So how about giving us millions of softball fans a break in your otherwise fine magazine?—*Forest City, Arkansas.*

Well, Gerald, it looks as if we'll have to get some of our writers out of doors and cavorting around the abbreviated softball diamond. But if they get out there and like it, how are we going to get any stories out of them? Writing is not generally an al fresco diversion.

Kidding aside, softball really should get more of a break. In all probability the reason it hasn't is that it is not yet sufficiently organized to win major sport rating either on

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the campus or in the sports pages of the newspapers.

But if your experts' computations prove true, it won't be long before it gets the play it deserves. One great thing about softball is that it is a participant's rather than a spectator's sport. And America has too many of the latter.

BIG TOWN BLUES
by Arthur O'Brien

Dear Cap: My home is in a comparatively small city out on the West Coast, and I have a loud beef to register—not against THRILLING SPORTS, which I think is fine, but against the New York monopoly on sporting news and publicity. It seems to me that about one out of every three stories (not local) I read on the sports page comes from New York and is about a New York team or a New York player.

Cap, do you think this is fair? If a fan outside of Cleveland wants to read about Bobby Feller and follow his progress regularly, he is out of luck. All he hears about are guys like Spud Chandler or Hal Gregg, who may be good pitchers for all I know, but have no national following. The same thing goes for all other sports. How come?—*Ventura, California.*

It's not fair, Arthur, but what to do about it is more than the Cap has been able to

figure out. The situation has developed into its present monopolistic status as naturally as breathing. You see, or the almanac will tell you if you don't, that New York is the Big Town.

It is, therefore, only natural that all of the major news services should have their headquarters in Manhattan, where they are in touch with more news with the exception of politics than anywhere else. And Washington is a notoriously poor sporting town.

So the bulk of our best sports writers, whatever their origins, move in or around New York save when they go afield for special spectacles. Most of the major sporting shows are held within the limits of the Five Boroughs.

Madison Square Garden is here, as are the Polo Grounds, the Yankee Stadium and Ebbetts Field. The Forest Hills Tennis Stadium and a number of the best polo fields and golf courses are within subway distance. Philadelphia, with its two huge stadia, is less than two hours away and Boston is only twice that by train. Columbia, New York University, Princeton, Yale, Penn and Harvard and many other fine schools are all within this radius.

So it is natural, since Manhattan is the focal area of such a concentration of sporting facilities and of the greatest potential and real gate receipts extant, that the writers should stick around. The result is that they get to know the men who promote, own, manage and play on the New York teams better than those of visitors. Surely you can draw the picture from there on in.

Once in awhile, of course, some community far from the banks of the Hudson will catch fire and top the big town. There is nothing in the East like the Rose Bowl, or the Sugar Bowl either for that matter.

The greatest boxing gate of all time was compiled in Soldier Field, Chicago, for the second Dempsey-Tunney fight in 1927. It topped two and a half million dollars. And the Green Bay Packers continue to draw, if mostly on the road. Then too, there is Notre Dame—but the Irish draw their biggest crowds in New York and Philadelphia.

The exceptions are legion. But scattered over a country the size of this one, they constitute a very sparse legion. Until some community or groups of communities can put on

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and support a sports program as varied and sustained as that of New York, the representatives of the teams it does have are, for the most part, due for the little end of the stick.

Hope that answers you, Arthur, if it doesn't satisfy you. That's the way things are. Meanwhile, fans, keep those letters coming. And don't pull any punches! Please address all your letters and postcards to The Editor, THRILLING SPORTS, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Thank you, everybody!

ON DECK FOR NEXT ISSUE

THRILLING SPORTS goes football in the next issue, which is headed by a stirring and amusing novel of the national autumn game, UNBEATEN SEASON by Tracy Mason. This is an unusual story, but one which packs plenty of dramatic gridiron action as well as a goodly quota of laughs.

Klamuth College is as unknown as was little Centre in Kentucky in pre-Charley Moran-Bo McMillan days. Primarily an agricultural school, its students toiled through the full day on a rigorous schedule that combined both classroom and actual farm work.

So when a few ex-G.I.'s, studying under their Bill of Rights privileges, decided to club together and form a football team, they had to agree to do their farmwork at night to get permission from the college president. And they had to level ground for a field, put up their own posts and purchase their own equipment.

Because they loved the game, they managed to do it—and they eked out victories from a couple of neighboring institutions which were down in their own class. Then came an unexpected game with State, which was rated as one of the nation's gridiron juggernauts, and listed Klamuth to get some practice on an open Saturday.

And Klamuth, by a combination of luck and grit, succeeded in holding their favored opponents to a 7-6 win and put itself on the football map. And from that dramatic moment on, many things changed at the

hard-working little agricultural school.

A big-time coach, seeing a chance to build up his reputation, soft-soaped his way into a job for the following season—and the players who had to put up a football field for fun, began to learn just how rugged big-time football can be.

What happened and what the boys did about it is the crux of the story—a story which will have all football fans hanging on every word from beginning to end. UNBEATEN SEASON is a novel which should remain unbeaten until the season ends.

Another THRILLING SPORTS star who will shine next time out is William O'Sullivan, whose magnificent novelet of professional football, CRAZY FOR TROUBLE, is one of the best ever to stem from the prolific O'Sullivan typewriter.

CRAZY FOR TROUBLE is the story of Stormy Weathers, who for ten years on the New York Titans, stood like a rock in the path of Brooklyn's league championship aspirations. His blocking and tackling and all-around aggressiveness won him a rousing chorus of Brooklyn boos whenever he stepped onto the field in his Titan moleskins.

But after ten years, Stormy found himself sold not down but across the river to the very club to which he had so long been a nemesis. And Brooklyn was a team rent by player troubles, owner trouble and coaching trouble, which got so bad that the coach quit.

And then the owner, who disliked Weathers as much as the most rabid Brooklyn fan, gave his ex-nemesis the nod, figuring the job would either bust him or give the Brooks the pennant they had been seeking so long in vain.

Stormy had troubles in large quadruple doses after that. But they are the kind of troubles that make for good football reading, which is what the story sets out to be and achieves. This is a big time yarn about big time football.

THRILLING SPORTS will also feature a full line-up of swift-moving short stories, to say nothing of Jack Kofoed's famous feature, THRILLS IN SPORT. This is one gala issue from cover to cover—and you'll enjoy every bit of it!

See you then. And good luck to you all.

—CAP FANNING.

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Rose Dawn, Official Scribe, The Mayan Order

Rose Dawn, brilliant radio personality known to millions, wants others to benefit from Mayanry as she has done!

If you are an average man or woman who is in a rut financially and mentally, the cost of a postage stamp may alter your whole life. All you are gambling is 3c—so you can't lose.

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