

FEB. 1949

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ALL SPORTS

15¢

HARD GUY

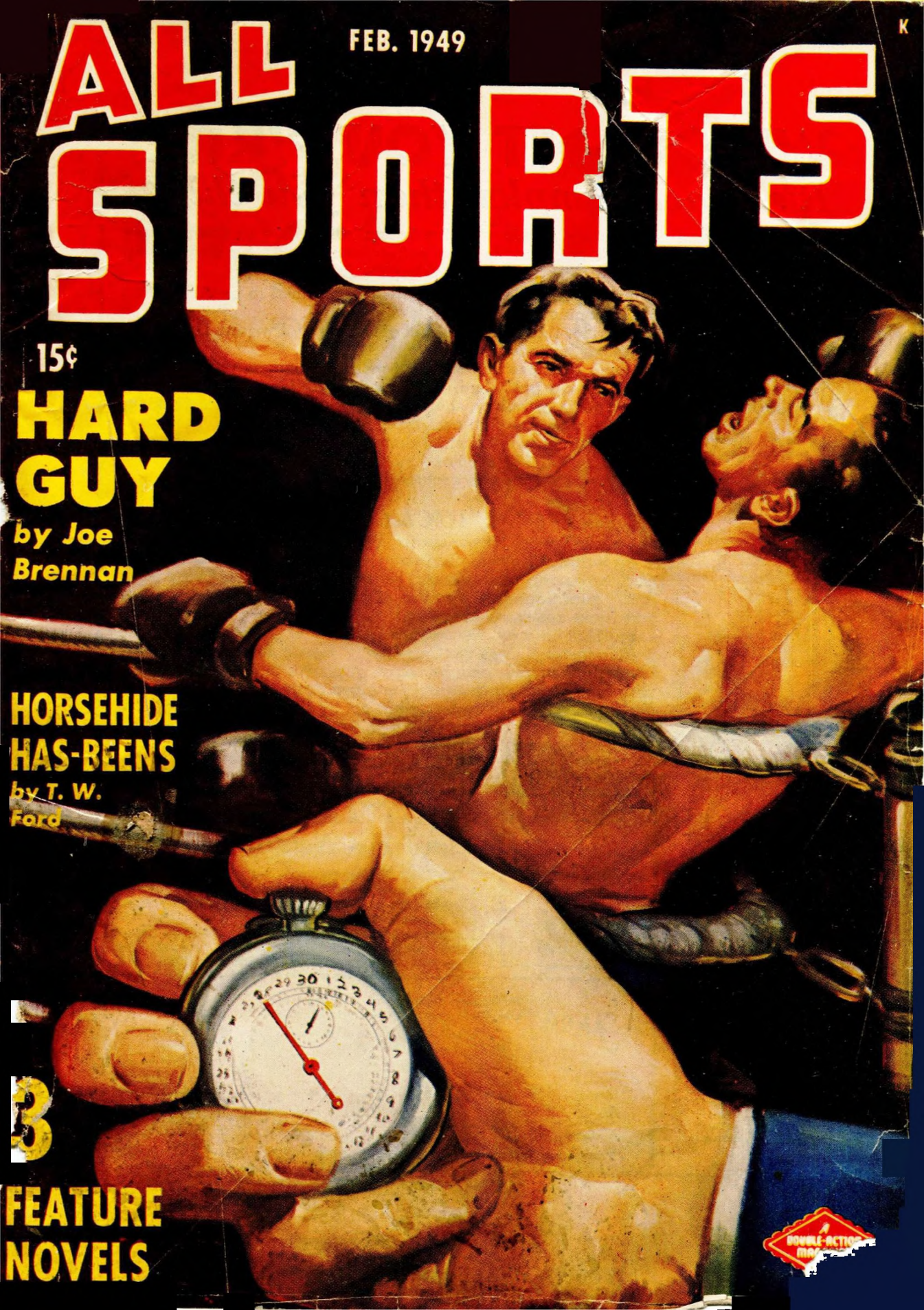
by Joe Brennan

HORSEHIDE HAS-BEENS

by T. W. Ford

3

FEATURE NOVELS



WHY CAN'T YOU WRITE?

It's much simpler than you think!



Conducts Newspaper Column Though Only Halfway Through Course

"Have just completed the first half of my N.I.A. course. It is rather early to think of myself as a writer, but nevertheless I am on my way to that goal. Tangible proof of my dawning success is my column 'Tignish Tellings,' printed in the Summerside Journal." — Kathleen MacDonaid, Tignish, P.E.I., Canada.



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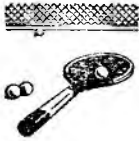
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ALL SPORTS

Volume 4, Number 4
February, 1949

Feature Novels



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Wadsworth Nealey 8

Sam Smith found what the pressure of gridiron tradition meant when . . .

HORSEHIDE HAS-BEENS (Baseball) T. W. Ford 30

We're all bums here, busher, and nobody expects us to win games, see!

BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE (Tennis)
Eric Rober 80

Long Joe couldn't be himself on the court—not if he wanted to win!



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You couldn't be anything but hard in the fight game . .

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Frisco Jordan was a bum who did nothing but hit homers!

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It looked as if Johnny Baldwin's break would leave him broken!

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He wouldn't quit—no, he'd keep on fighting. But his head hurt . . .



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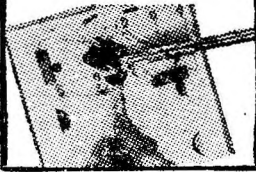
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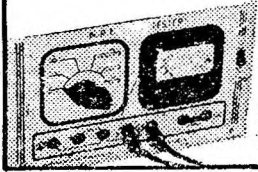
ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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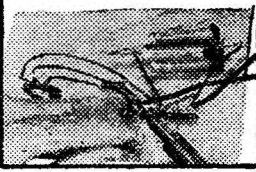
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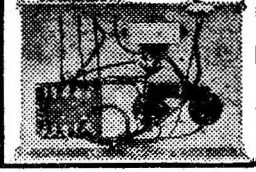
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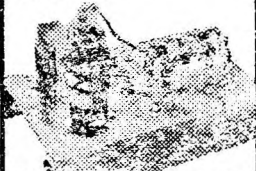
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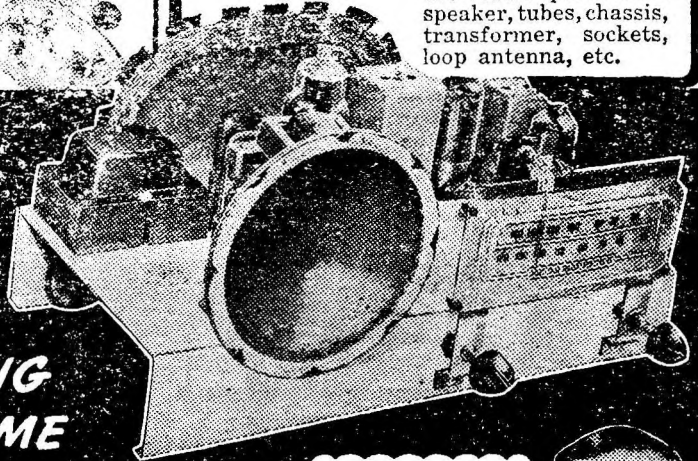


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Powerhouse Gridiron Novel



. . . Everything's fair in
love, war, and football . . .

A RACKETY RAX FOR THE BEARS

by WADSWORTH NEALEY

Nephew of one colossus of the gridiron, sent in to replace another, Sam Smith found what it was like to feel the pressure of tradition, the tradition of men who kept running when their legs were gone and their bodies towers of pain . . .

SAM SMITH, the football player, carried within his heart, his soul, and his mind, the memory and the music of a sturdy, freckle-faced guy with small feet and long legs, who was the greatest escape artist the gridiron ever knew and whose pre-war labors for the Boulder City Bears brought a curious kind of thrill and prosperity to the metropolis.

The man was Sam's uncle, Harry: "Hurrying Harry" Wrist he'd been called—a fast, shifty, elusive runner who had tucked a wind-jammed pig rind under a hard bicep and had swivel-hipped his way through broken fields to climax his efforts by crossing enemy goal lines standing up—as if he had been symbolizing the daily hazards that surround life on this earth, the constant struggle

to avoid the clutching fingers of defeat—and wriggle through, somehow, to a just victory.

"Hurrying Harry" Wrist had been no flash in the pan, no physical freak, no accident of sport. He'd been a master at the peculiar art of carrying a football unscathed, more or less, through eleven muscular and acrimonious athletes all bent upon grabbing him and burying him like a corpse in the ground. No football fan for miles around would ever forget "Hurrying Harry" Wrist, Sam was sure. But Harry Wrist would hurry across no more gridirons; he had lost both legs above the knees, during the invasion of Normandy. He walked now on artificial legs and with a cane.

Publicity for the general populace? In late winter, in the springtime, in



the summertime—yes. In the Fall of the year—no! From September to December homicides, two-headed calves, or parents of quintuplets in the Boulder City area couldn't hope for more than five lines in the daily newspapers, and they knew it. The big space was reserved for the Bears.

NOW, MR. Malachy Counaghan, principal owner of the Bears, escorted Sam Smith and Sam's immortal Uncle Harry to the press section of Wrist Municipal Stadium and seated them beside Bronko Carmichael, demon scout and fullback of the Mid-City Mastodons, on the theory, perhaps, that they could at least become insufferable friends for the afternoon. Bronko Carmichael probably never thought the time would come when he would find himself cheering whole-heartedly for the Bears. But the built-like-a-weight-lifter Mastodon hero was a violently partisan supporter of the Bears this day. Only for this matinee, though—for if the Bears bested the Rapid City Rams, then next week the Bears and the Mastodons would clash for the professional football championship of the world.

Carmichael knew that the Mastodons would draw more cash into the till playing the Bears in Boulder City, than playing the Rams anywhere, anytime. Even though his grip on business knowledge was weakened when the dollar slipped to 30 cents, Bronko Carmichael knew that meeting the Bears instead of the Rams, for the title, would be the soundest possible step commercially. He was an easy spending man who adored watching the beautiful orbs of show-girls, when he gave them diamonds. The romantic notion is, that everything is fair in love, war—and football.

Mr. Counaghan glared at him now and said, "Time wounds all heels, I understand." Then, turning abruptly, Mr. Counaghan walked away toward the Bears' bench.

"Why, Harry," Bronko Carmichael exclaimed. "Harry Wrist! A large hello!"

"A medium hello to you. Bronk," Harry Wrist said.

Sam Smith sat beside his Uncle Harry and did not pay much attention to Bronko Carmichael right then, because he was memorizing football plays and trying to get acclimated to professional football in a hurry.

Now those two utterly delightful and charming playmates of the Eastern Professional League, the Boulder City Bears and the Rapid City Rams, were readying themselves to perpetrate some modified murder on each other this afternoon. Sam saw "Bullet Bill" Zagurski booting a ball over the green-and-brown field. Sam knew it was Zagurski, because there wasn't another fullback anywhere in the world so huge—239-pounds on the hoof! "Bullet Bill" had been playing professional football a dozen years, but he was still, as of now, valuable to the Bears.

Bronko Carmichael turned his head and said, "Hell, I can't make notes this near you, Harry. I'm gonna find another seat somewhere." He arose and wandered away.

Harry Wrist put both hands on his cane, his chin on his hands and said, "A penny for your thoughts, Sammy, boy." Harry was smiling a little. He had an air of belonging in a professional football stadium, even if he did have two ersatz legs and a cane. After all, this stadium had been built with the money football fanatics had paid to see him play.

Just then the Bears' center passed the ovoid back to "Bullet Bill" Zagurski. The pass was bad, high. The Bears' fullback did not jump for it, shaking his head ruefully. Sam inquired, "Are Zagurski's knee's that bad?"

The Bears came in to the bench. Harry Wrist said, "The Bullet has slowed down plenty, yeah. But he still hits that line like a steam-roller!"

THE HUGE stadium was filled. This important game had brought out all the loyal rooters and their hollering was enough to thaw the frozen earth. The winner of this game would go into the East-West

championship playoff next week. Sam gawked at the good people. He said, the cold breath rushing from his mouth, "This is the first time I've seen the Bears play this season."

"Yeah, I know," Harry Wrist said. "Don't let it worry you, though."

Sam looked at his uncle again. How could the man be so cool, so detached? When his uncle turned and grinned, Sam's thoughts became at once happier and brighter as some of the tension lessened.

Sam said, "I'm the college upstart, the All-American boy, come to take Zagurski's place in the last and most important game of the season—assuming the Bears will get into next week's playoff."

Harry Wrist said nothing, didn't move a muscle.

"I'm scared," Sam said.

"What!" Harry Wrist jerked upright. "The Bullet has gained many hundreds of yards rushing this season, sure. He can go forward in a straight line, still, even if he isn't very quick. These good people won't like a substitute in there for him, I suppose."

Sam said, "I never bulled my way through a line in my life. With a football I'm supposed to be Mr. hipper-dipper-sleight-of-hand. From my kid days in grammar school that's the way you've taught me to be. You're the best teacher—" He closed his mouth on any more words; he could see that he was only embarrassing his Uncle Harry. Nevertheless, this was an awesome undertaking he had consented to.

Harry Wrist said, "The Bullet was with the Bears when I was playing. Everybody admires that big gorilla's guts."

"Yeah, me too—" His Uncle Harry would always be a sentimentalist about the Bears, Sam supposed, even if it cost them the championship. Again he looked at his uncle. "Neither Zagurski nor anyone else can fill the vacancy you left in the Bear lineup, Uncle Harry."

Harry Wrist placed his cane over his artificial knees and the knuckles of his right hand were white. He drummed on the cane with the fin-

gers of his left hand and said, "The Bullet's a game guy—a plunging fool. His knees are shot to hell, but he carries on."

"I sometimes wonder if it's worth it," said Sam. "I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't have been best to keep working my way through college until I got my degree in chemistry."

DOWN ON the field, Poffenberger was kicking off for the Bears now, and it came to Sam Smith with sudden surprise, that he knew all about the Bears, could identify most all of the pawns on that barred board. That came from reading the Boulder City Express every evening in his college room, he supposed. Poffenberger was a tough piece of steak who could play football when he got angry enough, and who could eat anything, anytime. Poffenberger was inclined to be lazy at times. He kicked off good and deep but too low. Sam shook his head.

Joe Cleets of the Rams took it, got behind his blockers. He got up over mid-field. The Rams looked resplendent in their purple-and-white uniforms. The Bears finally slowed them, though. They lined up on the Bears' 46 yard stripe.

Harry Wrist sat beside Sam and said very little, twisting his cane in his hands as Cleets cut back inside tackle. The Bear defense had shifted too far. Weight, Bear center, dove, but Cleets was through. McTouh, Bear quarterback, caught him away down on the eleven.

This Cleets had something on the ball. He muscled through guard. Weight clamped on to him, but Cleets shook loose, easily escaped the ponderous "Bullet Bill" Zagurski, and went over for the touchdown. Then he kicked the point. He was, admittedly, Mr. Rapid City Ram, in person.

In pro football, one TD is not so much, especially early in the conflict. There is, usually, a lot of scoring in the wide-open play of the pros. But this one was impressive.

Harry Wrist said, "We have to get that ball to go. The Bears' defense has always been their aggressive of-

fense." He was almost twisting his cane into wrinkles between his hands. He knew how futile Zagurski was without a ball to run with. Plenty he knew about it.

Sam said, "Heck, these Rams can't beat us. It's impossible!"

But it didn't look impossible. The Rams scored again that quarter.

The Bears scored one as the half ended, when "Bullet Bill" Zagurski started showing Cleets how to buck a line. But the Rams had outplayed the Bears all over the premises. Joe Cleets was having one of his inspired days.

Harry Wrist said, "Two to one they have us. I figured it the other way around. I figured we'd be leading by at least seven at this stage."

Sam noticed that Zagurski was limping quite a little as the Bears came in off the field. The crowd was silent.

Zagurski was 36, a genial giant, with Leon Errol knees. He had been the greatest, most colorful power-back since Jim Thorpe. His physical strength was tremendous; just watching it in action was enough to make Sam Smith gasp with sheer admiration. But now Zagurski's old bones were full of termites. The thought of trying to replace Zagurski was what frightened Sam. He said: "You patterned me after yourself, Uncle Harry. And although you never tried to buck a line very often, you won plenty of games for the Bears."

"You're still scared, Sammy?"

"Don't get me wrong, please. I'm only scared I won't come through for the Bears and you. I'm not frightened for me."

Harry Wrist's freckles disappeared inside the creases of his face when he grinned. He was terribly homely. But Sam Smith was a handsome young man, in a rugged, clean-cut way. He was no Victor Mature, no beautiful hunk of man, to be sure, but he was an adequate specimen. He was healthy. His crew haircut bristled electrically in the cold, but he didn't seem to miss a hat.

THE GAME resumed. The Rams kicked to the Bears. McTouh re-

ceived and started to run down the side line. Zagurski ran as though there were no braces on his knees, blocking. He bumped off two Rams, then they ganged up. Zagurski picked out Joe Cleets and let him have it. The man did not pick himself up right away after Zagurski hit him.

Sam said, "You see that? They're ganging Zagurski. They're playing his bum knees."

Harry Wrist said, "That's football. It will take a lot of ganging, Sammy, boy. The Bullet most always manages to hang around. He's like Scotch tape."

Zagurski managed to stick around for awhile. He was the glue that held the Bears together and made of them a one-for-all and all-for-one unit. He was a human dynamo. He gave a vivid splotch of color to a team that, otherwise, lacked it. He took the ball another time, or so, as the Bears slugged away at the big Ram line the hard way, over the ground. They went to the 20, and Zagurski was bellowing like a rampant water buffalo.

The Ram coach sent in five fresh linemen. They were ugly brutes as they crouched down there, daring Zagurski to bullet through tackle again. Zagurski scowled at them and bent down to take the pass from center.

It was Zagurski pounding to the left. He charged like a bull, Weight and Poffenberger blocking open the hole. The Rapid City Rams fell over one another to get at Zagurski. Weight and Poffenberger were buried. Zagurski was downed.

But Zagurski did not have the ball! McTouh had it and was fading right. Sullivan, Bear end, was feinting through the Ram secondary. McTouh caressed the pigskin as Sullivan started to run. McTouh threw it tenderly, as though it were a precious, fragile one-day old infant.

That Sullivan had been All-American end for Notre Dame last year. He had wings on his ankles and glue on his fingers. He flew down there and jumped. He leaped higher than the safety man. He captured the ball; then all he had to do was duck be-

tween the goal posts and touch the leather to the ground.

Sam said, "That ties it up. That was smart decoying in there!"

"I was all goose bumps," Harry Wrist admitted. "But those Rams won't be fooled that way again. They'll be back hammering at us."

And that's what happened, too. Joe Cleets was an eager-beaver, full of the sap of youth. It was strange pro football, because their pass attack was not much good. They could not decoy Poffenberger, Weight, "Bullet Bill" Zagurski, Sullivan, or McTouh; they had to let Joe Cleets run where and when he could.

It was rugged work. It was Tolstoy, the philosophic author, who said that battles are won and history made when some unknown foot soldier hurrahs his men forward instead of taking to his heels, rather than by the pre-meditated strategy. It is so, too, in the mock battles of football. On any outstanding team, there always is a leader, to whom the others look up and around whom they rally when the going is tough. His name, on the Rams, was Joe Cleets; his name, on the Bears, was "Bullet Bill" Zagurski. Zagurski kept diving in under the line play, so that every time Sam Smith thought Zagurski would not get up. How the man kept his trick knees intact, Sam just couldn't guess. Down on the Bear 15, Zagurski had his comrades so hopped up that the entire Bear line broke through, stood Joe Cleets upon his helmet; and the Bears took over on downs. McTouh booted it back; and the Rams started all over again.

SAM SMITH crouched up there in the stands and shuddered. A couple of times, Tom Sykes, the Bears' coach, sent out linemen and brought in one of the Bear spares. Zagurski was limping terribly now and should have come out, but Zagurski was tough and stayed in. Poffenberger got his scalp split open and had to be bandaged but he kept playing and was plenty rough, in there. This imbroglio would send them into the playoff and the big money, and everyone wanted it. But

the Rams crawled down again to pay dirt.

Sam cried, "Zagurski's legs! Look at them wobble! Surely he'll collapse now!"

Sure enough, the Bullet went down under a lamentable clip and he rested there, hands and knees on the ground, head weaving, as the referee paced off a 15 yard penalty against the Rams. The Bears all gathered around Zagurski. Somehow, he arose. He was the flame of the Bears. He offered them something which was intangible, and something which can not be purchased for money. Call it hatred of defeat. Call it love of victory. Call it killer instinct which all great competitors in all lines of endeavor always have had. Or just call it glue.

Harry Wrist said, "You see, that's why we want you in there next week—if there is any next week for us. The good Bullet just won't quit, and since, even with his bad knees, he is better than any sub now on the squad, Sykes lets him stay in."

Sam said, "He just can't last much longer. It's humanly impossible!"

Zagurski needed crutches out there. He was dragging his legs terribly now. The Rams were so sure he could not run with the ball; they were laying back for passes now. The quarter ended. They had the ball on the Bear six, first and goal.

Cleets took all four of them at the line. It was just about the most rugged scrimmaging Sam had ever seen. That Joe Cleets was like an animated block of granite. He went in there the final time; they all piled up so that Sam could not ascertain anything. Sam fished out a handkerchief, blew his nose and returned the handkerchief to his pocket before the referee could dig down and get the ball!

At last the referee arose and made rolling motions with his hand. Then he pointed dramatically down the field. The Rams had not made it. Harry Wrist said something which Sam could not hear, because 65,000 people were going crazy in Wrist Municipal Stadium. Zagurski was hollering at the boys, pulling them into

the huddle. Sam could see him banging two big fists together as McTouh gave the play.

They came out looking much snappier, Sam was sure, than they must have felt. They started a double reverse—one of the plays Sam had been memorizing—McTouh handling the ball. Harry Wrist put his hand on Sam's knee, and the hand was cold as ice through the cloth of Sam's pants.

Zagurski faked. There were players all over the premises. McTouh was under the Bear goal posts, fiddling with the ball.

This Sullivan, as has been stated, could run. He was looping down the side line like a big, startled cat. There were Ram backs and ends running with him, yelling, "Pass! Pass! Pass!" Everybody thought he knew what the play was going to be.

A big lineman broke through and dove at McTouh—and then, instead of heaving a 50 or 60 yard pass to Sullivan, McTouh side-stepped the clumsy lineman, leaned back and snapped a short shovel pass to "Bullet Bill" Zagurski, who was loping down the middle all by himself. Zagurski turned at just the right instant, as if he had been counting to himself, and grabbing the ball in one huge paw, started for the Ram goal.

Zagurski got up a good head of steam before the Rams started converging on him. His 239-pounds knocked down tackler after tackler. No one man could stop him. They just bounced off him. Finally he was brought to a screeching, screaming halt and downed by a horde of Rams—35 yards from pay dirt.

The Bears went into the huddle and came out quickly, for the clock was running out of time. McTouh was back. Zagurski was way back. The ball came to McTouh, who turned it skillfully in his hands and crouching low set up the ball for a placement—then "Bullet Bill" Zagurski stepping in, booted the leather straight and true over the enemy bar for three points, folding up on his bum knees as he did so.

Harry Wrist said, "Brother! That's the ball game, kid."

IT WAS like hearing the National Anthem in a foreign country with the flags all waving. Sam had all he could do to keep from crying happily. The Bears down there on that field were the bravest boys he'd ever seen—and the man he was to replace, "Bullet Bill" Zagurski, was the bravest of all. The game-ending gun, that sounded a few minutes later, was anti-climax. Sam watched them leave the field, those great-hearted Bears; then he sighed and looked at his uncle.

Harry Wrist said, "The boys had to carry poor Zagurski off. He must be dead."

"He'll really die when he learns I'm substituting for him next week. . . . Maybe it's sacrilege to say that, but—"

"You have a right to be scared, Sammy. I've been a Zagurski fan for many years, and it seems a crime to keep him out of the final playoff of the season; but the doctors have warned us that if the Bullet's knees ever buckle backwards instead of forwards, he's done for good."

Sam Smith leaned upon the figurative shovel of his thoughts. He had assumed that 'God helped only those who helped themselves', but some things were hard to understand. For instance, the deep purple mists of Valhalla now enshrouded "Bullet Bill" Zagurski, and that was just a genteel manner of saying that the old geezer, finally was washed up. It was curious, Sam supposed, how fast they became washed up in sports. One night, Joe Louis, for example, was a thumping terror, and the next night, he was just an aging champion of the world who, all at once found that nobody was scared to fight him any more. One day the New York Yankees were the greatest baseball team of all time, and the next day, they were calling the building wreckers and tearing down that immortal team and yelling for help from Newark and Kansas City.

Sam came back to earth, feeling sincerity mixed with caution in his uncle's voice. Harry Wrist owned a small piece of the Boulder City Bears, and was, besides, one of those

dyed-in-the-wool fans who keep professional football going and make it one of the most popular of American pastimes. He watched his uncle get up to go, and suddenly he felt terribly alone and inadequate. He moved over to assist his uncle down the steps and through the crowd.



THE FOLLOWING Monday, in the locker room at one end of Wrist Municipal Stadium, Sam Smith told the trainer who was helping him get acclimated, "Just stick the Michigan sweater in the locker, please." It was a heavy sweater with a big blocked "M" on the chest that Sam figured he needed around for morale-building purposes, when he got to brooding over how quickly they buried their heroes in this spectacular sport. He hoped the good trainer wouldn't think he was a rah-rah boy. He went to the clubhouse window and gazed upon the white-striped field, where the Bears, with gloves upon their hands, shivered like dehaired apes in the December morning practice. He kept his uncle Harry foremost in his mind, because he had great faith that this would help him in his ordeal. *It'll be an ordeal facing those Bears this first time, he thought.*

Sam was 21, a tall, lean 176-pounds. He stuffed the golden Bear jersey into the silken blue football pants. He wasn't happy with himself or his prospects. "Should've brought my scrapbooks for Zagurski to read," he said.

"The joke there," the trainer said sourly, "is that I'm not sure the Bullet can read. And it's a shame if he can't, for the way his knees are now, he's gonna have plenty of time on his hands. One more good whack, there, and the Bullet will hafta be fitted for wooden legs—if you ask me."

"You should know."

"Right, I been strapping those braces on his knees for three straight months, now."

"As goes Zagurski, so goes the Bears, 'tis said."

"Now, look, son, I can read. I read

last year where some say you were the best college climax runner since Red Grange. I read where you took Michigan through an undefeated season, to victory in the Rose Bowl—and how you later just about won the game single-handed for the Eastern All Stars. You were on everybody's All-American first team, too. But I understand you left school this year, in November."

"You're very well read, friend."

Sam trotted down the ramp and across the solidly frozen ground. A cold blast of wind came out of the north and nearly brought tears to his eyes. In a matter of minutes, he felt like an unwanted Eskimo. He knew, of course, that no one, actually, except coach Sykes, would be expecting him, although there were rumors about. Sykes said presently, "Here." He tossed a football at Sam. "Throw a few. Warm up. Kick it around a bit. . . . All right, boys; stop gawking and get back to work." And Sam was playing with the Bears almost before anyone realized it. Nothing was said then, though, of the plan to replace Zagurski with Sam in Sunday's contest with the Western Division champion—the Mid-City Mastodons. It was thought best not to upset the Bears with this news until the necessity arose. Zagurski himself was not present, although accounted for. Zagurski would not be in uniform again until Sunday—if then. Zagurski was in a hospital undergoing physical therapy treatment. Zagurski was grounded—all muscle and no wings.

So Sam worked out with the Bears in the punishing cold. After a time their cleats kneaded the grass until it became a little softer than cement. Everyone labored earnestly, the ends at catching the passes that Sam lobbed lengthily down the field.

Finally Tom Sykes walked over and said, "You can run, I know, but your bodyweight is rather light in this man's league, so I'm gonna rely on your arm more'n anything else. How is it?"

"It's numb with cold, Mr. Sykes."

"I guess you collegiates aren't used to playing football in this kind of weather. Yet, you know, Zagurski is

complaining because he can't practise in it."

"Zagurski is a remarkable character." Sam got the impression that Sykes didn't like this intrusion any more than the players did. "Why don't they put the Bullet in a wheelchair and let him get out here?"

SYKES IGNORED the remark and put Sam to work throwing spot passes to Sullivan, to the other ends, to some of the backs, until his arm got as warm as a neon tube. Sam had the Harry Wrist tradition to uphold; he held a certain pride in this, since for years they had called him "The ghost of Harry Wrist" because he had learned his lessons so well from his uncle that he was nearly a carbon copy of the great man. At college, the younger kid always had stopped or loafed at practice just to watch him work. He could handle the deft T-formation from quarterback and fake, spin, pivot, pass with equal artistry and unconcern. He knew the single wing also.

Sykes moved McTouh into the full-back berth and tried Sam at quarterback now in a T-formation attack.

Sam fed and faked to the Bear runners, each of whom could move with the speed of a scared jack-rabbit. Sam mixed the plays with consummate guile. He was a bright young man, and begrudgingly, the Bears seemed to accept this fact. Instinctively they knew that they could use his brains. But they didn't have to accept him as a brother—and they didn't.

Sam Smith was sent in to dress alone in about 60 minutes. Tom Sykes took him to the clubhouse ramp. "You do pretty well for a collegiate," Tom admitted. "Of course these fellows don't play for cheers—they play for cash."

"And because they love the game, perhaps," Sam said.

"You're a nephew of one of the owners, Smith. But don't go getting any fresh ideas in your noodle."

"This never was my idea, originally—and don't think I'm after a cut of the proceeds for just playing in one game."

"Well, just keep your hair combed," Sykes said.

Sam climbed the ramp. Inside, Bandage, the trainer, said: "Back so soon. Whassa matter?"

"I have to comb my hair."

"Oh. Well, you'll still find that monogrammed sweater in your locker."

"Fine."

"Er—listen, don't let these guys get in your hair, son. They all mean well, even if they don't know how to win friends and influence people. It's the sunset of a long, difficult season, and their nerves are taut."

This Bandage was nobody's fool.

Sam showered, thinking about the many games of football he had played in the past, how he had made the customers happy, or unhappy, according to their choice. He had done very nobly by the All-Stars, too. But a man cannot eat those things, he told himself. Later he dressed, and happily finding he could still walk, he went home.

THE NEXT day, heading for another practice, McTouh fell in beside Sam on the clubhouse steps. "The pros will murder you, bub. How much do you weigh?"

"Two hundred and eighty-three pounds," Sam fibbed. "With my Michigan sweater on."

"I heard Grantland Rice call you the Michigan Mallard, once. Is that why?"

"Huh? Oh that. No. That was because I had all the flighty qualities of a certain great man we will not mention at this time."

"Don't try to be mysterious," McTouh said, "We all know you're Harry Wrist's nephew, Sam Smith. Hell, we read the papers, you know." They went into the locker room.

"Ah, Sam." Bandage, the trainer said. "How goes the struggle?"

"I'm not a leper any more, it seems. Now I'm Dale Carnegie with a friend."

"He means well," McTouh said. "We all know any relative of Harry Wrist's must be okay."

"Sure, now, and he has a fine sense of humor," Bandage said, shaking his head. "And can this club use same?"

"The Mastodons will ruin us," McTouh insisted. "All of us. I doubt if

even Zagurski's moral support will help."

AFTER A while, when Sam followed McTouh on the field, personal conflicts didn't seem so important. The work was not fun; the work was grim and hard, and even Sam's young body screamed against the task.

Sykes on the field was pitiless. Even without the formidable Zagurski they were a good array. Any old fan who fancied himself rather highly as a flitback on the Coddington Wharf Tigers back around the good year 1908, would gladly lug the lemon and skedaddle once again in oral defense of the Bears. What a man needs after a certain age, of course, is more tomato juice, more bromo seltzer, and more, in a word, restorative—and the Bears were restoratives of a sort for the armchair athletes of Boulder City and vicinity.

The Bears had this truly remarkable pass-catcher, John J. Sullivan, the harp with many strings. Since it would have been sheer sacrilege to compare any wingman to the immortal Don Hutson, no Boulder City fanatic had cared to claim that the Bear end was the equal of the Green Bay Packer phenomenon. But everyone doggedly insisted that Sully "is the best since Hutson." Even that was strong praise.

First of all, Sullivan had terrific speed. He also had an artful collection of feints and his fingers were the sticky kind. In a game against the Rockets once, he caught a pass while on his knees, faked a lateral to slow-down an onrushing defender, and then scampered 30 yards for a touchdown. Another time he reached out a hand for a pass, flicked the ball with his finger tips over the head of the man guarding him, and then caught it in the other hand for a touchdown.

There remained in the backfield with Sam and McTouh, Goldberg and Lynch, young and married, with dependent kids and with the blast and drive of youth in their legs. Much of the Bear strength was concentrated in the strong line which wreaked devastation in a quiet, efficient way, and averaged better than

200-pounds per man from end to end, with the 270-pound whales, Weight and Poffenberger in the middle. They got few headlines, but they were the boys who did the damage, wearing down most enemy lines by the violence of their work and their down-field blocking. Even without Zagurski they would not be disgraced by any team—including the Mastodons. But they might be licked.

The Bears and the Mastodons had, this year, as most years, utterly dominated the American Association Circuit. Sunday's clash, if like their others, would be a titanic tussle all the way.

Sam Smith on his past record, ought not to disgrace the Bears, either, for even in college he'd had the know-how. In his Junior year, for example, when Michigan was playing Minnesota, Michigan advanced into scoring territory. The Golden Gophers braced for the favorite Michigan razzle-dazzle around the ends. But Sam had noticed that the defensive right halfback had been edging toward the sidelines. So in the huddle he told his line to open a hole on that side.

The ball snapped and Sam, the tailback in a single wing attack, started out as though he were about to head through the territory covered by the Gopher right halfback. Minnesota moved over and braced for the crash. But Sam stopped and shovel-passed to his fullback, who went unmolested for a touchdown. The play hadn't even been in the Michigan repertoire. Sam Smith had improvised it on the spot!

Now everybody went to work grimly. The sweat ran off Sam and turned to steam in the cold, empty stadium. Most of that week they worked without let-up.

At night Sam slept. He had no energy for troubled thoughts. He would lie in the opposite bed listening to his Uncle Harry Wrist talking of other days, of the time he had played against Red Grange in the Polo Grounds in 1921.

It was a nice story, but along toward the end, Sam fell off to sleep, as if his head had been lightly thumped with a sledge, and his Un-

cle Harry slept too. Outside in the night a steam train chugged past on the tracks and left a little more soot on the once-white paint of Harry Wrist's modest home. Harry Wrist was not a wealthy man, and Sam Smith would never be a wealthy man, because athletes come, and when they wear out, they go, and are replaced by younger, healthier men.

Often when athletes grow old or broken in the football harness there are things at which they can earn their living. There are coaching jobs or a part ownership in a club, for instance; but these jobs, Sam Smith might well have been dreaming, were mostly for the distinguished superstars, such as his Uncle Harry Wrist—not for young men who wanted to be chemists and abandon strenuous athletics in their old age. Sam did not want to be a hero for the young. Glamorization that would induce unequipped kids to get themselves needlessly massaged was not, in Sam's humble opinion, the Lord's good work.

SAM REPORTED again, for practice, on Friday morning, late, and Boulder City was certainly not Miami, Florida. It was cold. Tom Sykes sat on the end of a bench in the dressing room and said, "I've been waiting for you, kid. They want you at the front office. 139 Main Street."

Sam was not surprised, since he had, as yet, signed no contract. He had not, particularly, been interested in a contract. He had been interested only in helping his Uncle Harry and the Bears out of a jam—if he could. Nevertheless, with the approach of Christmas, cash in hand would feel pretty good. "To sign the dotted line, eh, Mr. Sykes?"

"I didn't ask them." Sykes was built like an iceman who had trouble keeping the suet of his waist under a belt. "I have enough troubles without foolishly inquiring for more. You're supposed to see Counaghan, is all I know. Maybe the man is gonna tell you where you can get a job selling vacuum cleaners when Zagurski recovers."

Sam took a bus back to the center

of town and went to the glass and chrome-finished offices of the Boulder City Bears, where the halls were packed with the ticket seekers who wished to see the Bears play the Mastodons for the championship of the football world. He did not blame the public for this excited state of mind. He knew it would be a magnificent ball game, with each player on the winning team getting a big extra slice of dough. But for one thing and another, he would have wished devotedly to be one of these fans himself, with nothing else to do but purchase a seat on the 50 yard line.

The girl at the desk, who seemed to know him, said, "Miss Magazane will see you right away."

"Mr. Counaghan. I came to see Mr. Malachy Counaghan."

"You have an appointment with Miss Magazane. It says so right here on my pad."

"To get a manicure?"

"She's no manicurist, but she's capable of giving you a haircut, a shave, and a quick massage, if you're nasty, Sammy, son."

Miss Magazane opened the door herself, offered her hand and gripped Sam's rather firmly. "I'm Margaret Magazane," said the girl, and he thought of the song entitled "Margie", but could not recall either the music or the lyrics thereof. He followed the girl into the room, employing himself in gazing at her beautifully shaped legs, before he sat down in the chair placed before her desk in the accepted business fashion.

Margaret Magazane sat down in a swivel chair, where she gave Sam the impression that she knew what all the telephones were for. He began to worry about the shadow of beard upon his chin and the wrinkles in his overcoat. She offered him a cigaret which he declined. "Oh, in training, eh?" said Miss Magazane. "Many pros smoke, you know—during the football season."

"So far, I'm a simon pure," said Sam.

"So far you are. You were even simon pure in college. You were working your own way through without the aid of any football scholar-

ship. That's one of the things I remember about you."



SAM WONDERED, with a good puzzled wonder, if the scalp showing through the close-cropped bristles upon his head had revealed it as a crystal ball, so that this girl could read his mind like a Hindu Swami just by sitting there across the desk. "One of the things you remember about me?"

"At Michigan," said Miss Magazane. "You never wore a hat there, either. To keep expenses down, no doubt."

"Maybe I'm Napoleon," Sam said. "Maybe you're Cleopatra—but let's not report to a sanitarium just now. How do you know so much about me? Were you at Michigan?"

She laughed. She didn't look crazy. "Class of forty-five. Two years ahead of you," she said. "You used to visit a coed at Alpha Omega house, who told me all about you. You shouldn't confide in girls when they're that young, Sam. Not if you want secrets kept."

Feeling warm, he arose and removed his overcoat. He sat down, wondering how in the world even the large Michigan campus could've hid this girl—for he'd never seen her before. He said, "Look—I'm just a Rover boy at heart. Nobody warned me about you."

"You're a great kidder," she said. "You have strange and wonderful talents, which you'll use for us Sunday—and next year, too, I hope."

"What about Zagurski?"

"We're going to take that man's fate in our own hands and retire him while he's still in one piece. Next year he'll coach one of our farm clubs." Miss Magazane tapped her cigaret into the tray upon her glass-topped desk, and left it there. "We've got to win Sunday, Mr. Smith. It is absolutely essential that we get into front-line bidding position for the young college footballers who want to sign pro contracts next season. Some of our older men are getting ready to leave the Bears."

"Tell me," Sam said. "Just what are you around here?"

"I'm one of the vice presidents, Mr. Smith. I'm the niece of Malachy Counaghan—which helps."

"Oh. Well, about playing pro football for a career, Miss Magazane. I'd rather be a chemist. The initial income is smaller, but it's easier on one's epidermis."

"You can go back to college and get your degree during the off season. You'll be able to afford to study harder, and not have to stoke furnaces in your spare time."

He knew this was true, but he said, "Are you telling me?"

She said, "Let me call you Sam," and surprised, he nodded assent. "We'll give you a good contract, because, if you must know, we think you're worth it."

Just then Mr. Malachy Counaghan strolled in as though he owned the building, which, of course, he did, and walking over to the desk, squeezed Margaret just above the girdle, with the proprietary sense due a rich uncle. Sam winced just the same, though. Mr. Counaghan said: "A big hello, Sam."

"Hello, Mr. Counaghan."

"Sam's ready to be ours now," Miss Magazane told Counaghan. "Body and soul."

They both looked at Sam and they both looked pleased. As for Sam, he didn't deny anything. He read the contract Mr. Counaghan handed him, signed it, and returning the original and keeping the carbon, he arose and said, "Well, I'll be going, now." He shouldered into his overcoat.

Mr. Counaghan said, "I'll phone Sykes right away."

"I'll be sitting with Harry Wrist in his usual spot, Sunday," Miss Magazane said. "You know the place—in the press section?"

"I do." Sam wondered if he sounded like a new bridegroom. "I hope you won't be as disappointed about my taking Zagurski's place, as some of the fans are going to be. *A bientôt*, Mr. Counaghan."

When he boarded a bus to go home, Sam was surprised to find his uncle Harry Wrist sitting therein. He sat down and surprised his uncle. He ex-

changed "hellos", then he was silent for several blocks, locked in his own thoughts. "I met Miss Margaret Magazine today," he finally said.

"She'll make some man a nice wife," Harry Wrist said. "Good business head."

"No snob, either," Sam said. "She doesn't mind seeing male physiques in the sports sheets instead of Society's Sunday rotogravures." She reminded Sam of girls he had known at school. She also reminded him that most athletes need a personal as well as a general audience. He supposed he was no exception. Most people would rather converse with a cigar store Indian than with a Tarzan who had all his brains in his muscles. Sam thought about that matter of personal audiences.

The bus was passing some sandlot goal posts in a vacant lot on Railroad Avenue, and they were the upright ghosts of a decade back, when Sam had played on the Longfellow Grammar School Lions. Who had been his audience then, and who had been like a big brother, a father and a coach, constant on the sidelines? Who had bought him the football jersey and sewed on the number when it was torn off? Who had put the tape on his little wounds, corrected his juvenile errors and blown his nose? Why, this man beside him, now, of course—this man who had taken him in when his own father and mother had been killed in an auto accident—this Harry Wrist. Sam knew he would be a very bad foul ball if he didn't at least try to repay his Uncle Harry for those long gone, those happy days.

The bus bowled along to the few remaining blocks they had to travel, and Sam's tongue remained folded like a sausage in his mouth. His uncle pulled the cord. The bus stopped. He took the bag of groceries from his uncle's arms and helped him off the bus and into the house.

After dinner he played several games of checkers with his uncle. Harry Wrist was an expert disc pusher. Sam could hardly crown a king. Later Sam went into the bedroom and read a magazine before turning in for the night. It was hard for him

to concentrate on the pages, though, for somehow he felt like an over-rated fraud. There was to be no more practice before the big game.

SUNDAY, a cold, wet snow was falling in the morning when Sam went to church with the prudent intention of petitioning the help of the Lord. Afterwards he rode to the stadium in his uncle's car, and he never tired marvelling at the expert manner in which handicapped Harry Wrist handled an automobile in heavy traffic!

There were many people in Wrist Municipal Stadium for the Bears' final struggle with the Mastodons; there were just about as many people as could stand up or squeeze into a seat in the place. It had stopped snowing.

Tom Sykes, a fat and sloppy beast, with a quick, hard brain, piloting the Bears into another play-off, against the Monsters from Mid-City, rubbed his bloated face as he talked. He called his beloved rowdies into a tight little huddle on the south side of the field, out of which Poffenberger waddled to midfield, as team captain, to toss a quarter or a nickel with Bronko Carmichael and the referee in his striped shirt and his white knickerbocker pants.

Bronko bellowed, "Heads!" and heads it was, with Bronko choosing to defend the west end of the field, after testing the wind with a wetted finger. It meant the Mid-City Mastodons would receive.

When Poffenberger returned, Tom Sykes was holding Sam by the elbow in an iron grip, and his mouth was a slit from a grim mask. The silent, restless Bears glared back at him.

Sykes said, "This here is Sam Smith, as you know without being formally introduced. You guys know his college record and how he's gone in practice with us. He runs this team today."

"Bullet Bill" Zagurski, who was present and in a uniform against everyone's orders, sagged his head like a dejected horse. It was McTouh the fiery redhead, who snapped, "What's this, Tom, rah-rah stuff?"

Someone coughed harshly. Zagur-

ski's bad knees had turned everyone sour; none of the home club was in good humor.

Sykes repeated, "I say he plays quarter. What I say goes. He's got the signals; you listen to 'em. The Bullet'll be ready in a pinch. I want no truck with soreheads, now. Get out there and push those Mastodons around like you done last year." His voice had the tone of an off-key bull-fiddle and he wore his toughness like Gargantua.

There was a hushed moment as the Bears broke from their side line, all eleven of them, to join Bronko Carmichael and his hoodlums on the gridiron. The field was somewhat soggy and seemed enormous to Sam as he got ready for the whistle and the kickoff. The Bears knew and everyone knew that this could be a massacre, that the veteran Bears could fold before the younger Mastodons today, and let the Monsters from Mid-City gain revenge for last year's defeat. The calendar had run the entire gamut from December to December, and once again it had arrived at the date which featured this annual blood-and-guts battle between these boys who played football for pay.

It had been a two-team monopoly. Such was the mechanics of schedule-making that these two traditional rivals in this professional version of the Harvard-Yale series invariably bounced up for this meeting with the football championship at stake. One or the other of them had been in the playoff from its very inception; the Bears on seven occasions, the Mastodons on six.

Sam Smith rolled a little as he trotted back from helping McTouh tee up the ball.

THEN THE howl arose. It was like rubber-tired wheels protesting on a wet highway, like seagulls scrabbling over fish-scrap; coming from human beings, it was shocking! There is no doubt that the men-of-distinction and after-shave clubs represent a very high point in American society. Their members bleed blue at a moment's notice. However, there was no tong in the Boulder City area,

at this time, which had a more distinguished membership than the Here's - What - I'd - Do - If - I - Were - Managing - The - Bears Club.

The club had its right and left-wing elements, and its purpose was to make itself heard publicly, whenever anything happened to the Bears which did not meet entirely with membership approval. They began casting oral votes now. Their resentment came out of the seats like thundering surf. It crashed over Sam, nearly drowning him. A fan with a voice like a brass foundry, roared above the noise, "Take that skinny clown outa there. We want Zagurski!"

The whistle shrilled, and Sam, running down to kick the ball, slipping on the wet grass, fell flat on his face. He lay there, feeling deeply mortified indeed. But he arose, his chin jutting out a foot, and went back to try again.

McTouh said, "For pity sakes, fiddle-foot, are you jittery so soon?" McTouh hadn't liked being replaced at quarter, Sam knew. All the Bears resented the fact that a raw college boy was trying to replace the great Zagurski in this important money game. That was because they did not understand. It was a revolutionary experiment to be sure, and only Harry Wrist's belief in his nephew, and his ability to convince Mr. Coughan of that belief, had put it across.

Sam told McTouh, "You see that you're not jittery yourself." His voice was so harsh that he hardly recognized it as his own. The jumping of his heart steadied within his chest, lessened to a pounding thump-thump-thump. This was the apex of his life; this was his destiny to save or destroy. That it calmed him, that he was all right, was rather amazing, for he had had little time to prepare for it. He had been home from college only a short time when his uncle had brought it up out of a clear sky.

They lined up and the whistle blew again; Sam brought a heavy foot into the ball and watched it ride deep into the arms of Bronko Carmichael, who moved to the 25, very nicely, until Poffenberger sat rudely upon him.

Behind Sam the jeers were still lifting and the guy with the brass-foundry voice was shouting, "We want the Bullet!"

I'd like to give the guy a bullet, Sam thought, *right between the eyes.* Quickly Sam looked up into the press section of the stands. He could see Harry Wrist and Margaret Magazane hunched there in the cold. He wondered if it looked to them as if he couldn't take the riding of these fans? He wondered if they were disappointed in him already? With a struggle, Sam pulled his mind back into the game.

At first sight, Bronko Carmichael was all muscle. At a second look, he was all heart. And when he started his furious line bucking, he drew the out-of-town customers to their feet, and they mentally charged into the Bear line with him, heart-beat for heart-beat, stride for stride. Bronko was very agile for a big man. Sam was amazed!

The Mastodons went into another double wing; shifted to the left and halfback Ford broke from the formation and hit the short side for four yards. The Mastodons assumed kick formation on the next play and a foot rose through the atmosphere, but no football! It was being hustled toward an end by a large individual named Goodwin, thence lateralled with competence to Bronko Carmichael, while Mister Goodwin took the legs from under Sullivan, Bear end. Sam, in the secondary, set himself for the advancing Bronko, who was as efficient in a broken field as a bulldozer. Bronko offered his left arm like a wagon-tongue to Sam's face. Sam did not want it. He dropped with his arms spread out and hit the Bronk in the weskit. The two of them toppled together.

They were slow arising; Bronko, somewhat astonished at being stopped by a mere 176-pounds, and Sam because his shoulder was a flame and the rest of his body was charcoal for the pain.

Bronko was forced to boot, which he did, deep and outside on the Bears' 31. Soon Sam began packing the ball for the stubborn yards, with McTouh, Goldberg and Lynch show-

ing the way, with Sullivan, Poffenberger and Weight opening the holes. They got a first down and then another, but Sam was as punchy as a sandbag by now. Something hit him during a tackle slant and he wondered if possibly he had crashed into the steel goal posts? He was a very groggy lad for the nonce, and when next he attempted to skedaddle around an end, the ball popped out of his numb, stiff fingers, and a Mastodon was smugly snuggled over it on the grass. Mastodons' ball—and the jeers penetrated once again into Sam's aching skull.

Bronko and the Mastodons began to move a little more than somewhat. They grabbed themselves a first down. Then Bronko faded deep while the Bears chased him back of the line, and heaved a long one down the sewer-pipe. Maney, the Mastodon end, took it over his shoulder for six; Carmichael added the extra point, while Sam looked about for a handy hole into which he could crawl.

HE WENT a little crazy after that, under the relentless ragging of the crowd, and started moaning with anguish, "What a dope I am! What a lunkhead, to think I could replace Zagurski out here today." He wasn't even warmed up. Soon he waxed positively poetic and profane about his shortcomings, calling himself everything negative in the dictionary, until McTouh slapped him in the face and said sharply: "Cut out the hysterics, Smith. And, anyway, no one in this big, unhappy universe is disputing the fact that you're a groan man."

Sam missed the joke. On the next play he was running with the lemon; then the next thing he knew, he was gazing into the sky and there was cold water on his face. There was "Bullet Bill" Zagurski hobbling in to replace him. He stumbled and half fell to the side line where he heard the fan with the flat, trombone voice, trumpeting derogatorily. "What fell on me?" he asked Tom Sykes. The Bears' coach said nothing at first, just kept wiping the blood off Sam's face.

"I'd hate to tell you," Sykes said,

finally. "Bronko was very anxious to get you out of there. You've been tossing him all over the premises. You've knocked out four Mastodons already."

Sam couldn't recall any of that, but in his tired way he thought it was splendid. He glanced at the scoreboard; it read: Mastodons 7; Bears 6. "Who did it, Mr. Sykes?" he inquired. "Who got the six?"

"You did, vacuum-head, with help, of course—but babble to somebody else now, will you? I'm busy."

One lousy point, and it can maybe cost me the faith of Uncle Harry, and the respect of Miss Magazane, Sam thought, practically and spiritually depressed; practically for those who had put their trust in him, and spiritually for himself. He felt gone in the heart and the legs. The gun ending the half, barked suddenly, and he arose from the bench and trudged with the others into the Bear dressing room.

He was one of the last to go inside. This was the part he dreaded the most. On the field, in action, there was the illusion of being one of them, because they treated him like a Bear, more or less. Here, in the lessened excitement of the dressing room, trailing the Mastodons at the half, they were not at all friendly.

Tom Sykes was in uniform. An old-school lineman, he could never get over that habit of the uniform. He did not wear the pads, of course, but he wore the jersey and pants and cleats, even to sit on the bench. He was talking now, correcting errors, peppering up his boys, the vault-like room rumbling with the sound.

"If you guys don't try, you don't make mistakes." Sykes spat out the quick, choppy sentences. "And the guy who doesn't make mistakes is not worth a damn." He pointed at Sam. "There's our champ today. Enter him in the heavyweight class."

Wearily, Sam went to the fountain and bent down to drink, feeling eyes upon him as he did so. He quenched his thirst and looked up into the gray face of "Bullet Bill" Zagurski.

The giant back's eyes were blood-shot, but his courage was still manifest. Sam started to speak, checked

himself. Zagurski said in a low voice, "I can't play any more ball today, kid—these knees. Like the Old Gray Mare, I ain't what I uster be. Watch Bronko; every time he charges the line he has a habit of putting his chin on his chest. Every time he throws a pass, he pushes his chin out like a box. Hit him in the belly—he doesn't like it there."

"Thanks," said Sam. "I'll remember that." He watched Zagurski climb up on a table and have his knee-braces removed by Bandage, the trainer.

Poffenberger complained mildly of a Charley horse in his thigh, and somebody else griped because no one had used the pass play from the double reverse. But Tom Sykes dominated the room like an old hen—aged before his time with the slowness that comes early to some heavy men.

On a pro team you have married men, single boys, confirmed bachelors and a few divorced ones. You have a strange crowd who go out every Sunday and commit and receive mayhem, for too little money. Sam realized how difficult it was to please a gang like this. It came to Sam with a shock, too, how much some of the married men needed the winners' share today for the support of their families.

A man came inside presently and cried, "Time to resume, Tom!"

Tom Sykes came over to Sam and said, "Okay, son, put on your helmet and get back out there. Better stick it out this time—for Zagurski is through for today and for all time."

Sam strapped his golden helmet under his chin and tailed out after the surly, burly Bears.



SO THIS was the second half, now, with the Bears' hope and high resolve being rudely discouraged on the very first scrimmage.... McTouh, trying an end-around, was promptly thrown for a five yard loss. Football fans, like the game they yell at, are not polite. All afternoon, now, they had been grumbling at Sam Smith because, among other things, he seemed backward about parting the enemy's hair

with his shoe cleats. He was too mild-mannered and gentlemanly—a bad thing in professional football, and especially during the championship playoff. But now, for a change, they hopped on McTouh. McTouh came back to the huddle, stomping, glaring, heaving his helmet toward the sidelines. Sam bent over, hands on knees, chin on chest, and gave the next play. His stomach contracted once as he stole a glance at the hostile heads around his own, and as they went back to their positions, Sam could once again hear the brass-lunged fan shrieking, "Itty-bitty Rover boy's not pushing college kids over now!"

The Bears went into single-wing formation, shifted, and the ball came back to Goldberg. The play moved wide with Sam running as fast as he could, to cut the legs from under that earnest and pivotal Mastodon, Bronko Carmichael. No one hooted when Sam ran, for the very obvious reason that everyone recognized talent when he saw it. The college boy had taken out the great Carmichael. Sam sat upon the Bronk's Aldermanic middle and watched Goldberg plow 19 yards before they contrived to push him outside. Sam arose and went back into the huddle to call the play.

Inside him, now, was a churning, heavy-hearted, but happy rhythm; the blood-stirring tonic as of a good battle ahead.

It was Lynch this time. He got two, and Bronko, calling time out, brought his Mastodons back for a conference. The Bears' sudden success had upset some delicate morale, the thing which, heretofore, had kept the Mastodons believing in their own invincibility.

The home-town crowd was beginning to cheer a little now, but the brazen-lunged critic behind the Bear bench howled, "So itty-bitty Rover boy can run and is a field general! Who wants generals? Who wants gazelles? We want Zagurski!"

In the huddle, his big, redhead bare in the cold, McTouh growled, "Okay, collegiate, you gave us six. Let's see what these soreheads can do about getting us six more."

Lynch patted Sam on the shoulder

pads. Sam called for a pass play, hustled back to receive the center-pass from Weight. Sam had not expected anything but resentment from the Bears. They properly thought him an untried college boy, and no doubt believed that Zagurski was more valuable to them with two bum legs, than any rah-rah hero with two swift legs.

Sam had to do more than score six points on the losing side, he knew. The Bears were almost worthless without Zagurski's leadership. Without a guiding spirit, they were old and tired; they needed a shot in the arm, a morale lift.

A GAIN SAM looked into the press section of the stands, but this time both Harry Wrist and Margaret Magazane saw and waved to him. He faded back, his long fingers wrapped around the ball, and, looking for Sullivan, he knew that he could not afford to think of his uncle or Miss Magazane. He grimly thrust both from his mind. The Bears, downfield, had been flattened to the grass. McGoan, playing guard for the Mastodons, dived at him. He shoved McGoan on the mandible. He saw an opening and galloped, running down an alley of tumbled bodies.

The forward pass is a pretty precision play. It tantalizes and frustrates the enemy; but there is nothing to thrill the human eye and heart like the sight of a runner, twisting, turning, dodging, evading the reaching talons of his foe, weaving his pattern of hairbreadth escape down a soggy, white-striped field, and leaving, as debris in his wake, the once-proud bodies of his rivals, littering the premises in futile heaps to mark the course of his passage. Sam got to the Mastodon's 35, to the 30, and engendered a new kind of hysteria in Wrist Municipal Stadium, as time after time the Monsters from Mid-City slid from his thighs, hurling their bodies skittering off his twisting hips and tumbling to the muddy earth in reckless and frustrated fury. Sam got to the 25.

The stands rose in mass now to the rhythm of Sam's running, and 69,000 bodies moved with his in a

kind of mass dance of flight from seizure. A brass-lunged roar soared above their frenzy, and the erstwhile critic behind the Bear bench, led them all in a mounting crescendo of cheering that lifted pitch by pitch until the hairs stood up on the back of Sam's sweating neck. He got to the 20, but there they finally caught him and spilled him hard. Yet Sam felt wonderful, like the many times on college fields not yet forgotten.

"Was that you or the ghost of Harry Wrist, Sam?" McTouh inquired.

"Let's get going!"

"Think where you are, Sam. You're not doing or dying for dear old alma mammy now. You're only playing for a bit of cash on the line."

"I'm playing football—whether for glory or for cash. . . . Football! Let's get going."

THE MINUTES sped by like swallows darting into a barn. The single point lead, enjoyed by the Mastodons, began to loom. The suspense was electric. The tension was terrific. It seemed as though the Bears sat beneath a piledriver, which any moment now, would, in the shape of the Mastodons, drop upon them and flatten them, conquered, into the earth.

The Bears went back into the huddle again and Sam came out, erupting up the middle this time, almost begging for someone to get in his way, silently aching to prove himself, torn between the desire to save the game for the Bears and to complete the mission his uncle Harry had planned for him here. Inside him the churning mounted as he collided with the enemy and went seven yards on sheer momentum, crawling the last two on his hands and knees. He made a first down on the Mastodon eight-yard line from which McGoan did not arise. Bronko called time and began working his beloved hoodlums into a fever pitch of resistance. They began to howl and dance around Bronko in their high resolve to stop the Bears.

Sam removed his helmet and, accepting a dipperful of water, washed out his mouth and squirted the resi-

due into the ground. The Bears were coming alive under Sam's leadership, and the Mastodons resented it. Sam gave the dipper to Poffenberger.

McTouh, scowling, had come up also. He waited his turn around the water bucket, standing motionless on strong, bulky legs. He looked at Sam and said, "Now you have us playing football, chum."

There was something strange here, and Sam wondered what it was. There were no gay and pretty gal cheerleaders anywhere this time, shrill, defiant, urgent in victory or defeat—that's what it was. No Michigan gal to go on a date with him after the game and tell him what a big-shot he was—unless, of course, Miss Magazine would consent. Sam thought about this difference between college and pro ball, and his legs were shaking with the effort he had made.

But back to business now. The teams returned to their positions. The crowd was suddenly hushed, waiting.

It was Goldberg on a sneak play, failing to push the score across. The crowd began to chant, speak again now, led by Sam's former critic, "Smith! Smith! Smith!" It was the old college yell, now almost forgotten. It was the last sound Sam had expected to hear here.

He merely dented the line with his helmet on his next attempt. His gain was six inches, net.

No matter how big a star a back-field man may be, he cannot proceed alone on his own efforts. There is always the tendency in shouting or writing the sagas of a great hero, to neglect the contributions of his teammates; ten other men to provide interference, blocking out would-be tacklers, screening, protecting the ball-carrier.

Of course interference in itself can be hazardous, for the foot of a fallen friend can trip and bring downfall as certainly as the efforts of the opposition. It was a part of Sam Smith's peculiar genius, taken, perhaps, from his uncle Harry Wrist, that he could use the exertions of his teammates and not be trapped by them. He could run behind the Bears as long as they were useful to him, and cut away

from them the moment they commenced to impede his progress.

The second time he went wide like a coursing fox, chased by hounds, picking his way. Someone forgot an assignment, though, and failed to dig a hole for Sam. He started to yell, "You dummies, can't you remember anything?" Then he closed his mouth like a steel trap and cut in sharply, spinning; he went over, standing up. Poffenberger came back and said:

"I'm sorry I didn't take out my man for you there, Sam. But I'll take out two this time to make up for it. Kick that extra point, fella."

Sam did. The Bears had a six point lead now—13 to 7. Sam took a deep breath. How long, he asked himself, could this go on? He did not dare look into the press section of the stands. The pressure upon him was too severe. This was the time when games were won or lost. His jaw set hard.

The teams lined up for the kick-off, with the Mastodons electing to receive. The flags were belligerent in the wind above the crowd. *Oh, Gawd, Sam thought, give me just a little more strength. Let me stand up before those who expect it of me.* He toed into the ball.

It went high, and far, far away, tumbling into the hands of the once militant Bronko Carmichael. The great man did not move too far with it before Sam, remembering Zagurski's advice—dove into his belly and brought Bronko Carmichael tumbling down. The ball game moved along and into the final quarter. The Mastodons were trained and healthy, if not inspired. And they were still eager; their linemen squeezed through like fish through a net, when McTouh and Sam tried again to move the ball. The pace was rugged. Bronko Carmichael, the pain in his stomach somewhat more intense than the youth he no longer possessed, rather sensibly walked to the bench and directed a fresher replacement for himself.

Six points was not much of a lead with the end of the game now within sight. Sam kept turning to look at the big clock on the stadium wall.

"Watch the ball and not the clock," growled the fiery Mr. McTouh.

"Stop bothering me, Red," replied the rather absorbed Sam Smith, "this is a busy time in here."

IT WAS the Bears' ball at mid-field. *I can't afford to make any mistakes now,* Sam thought. The magic speed of his legs was gone and he couldn't run any more. So he passed his way along with a rubbery arm. He stood in the storm of the Mastodons' determined charging. He got the ball away each time, to his backfield mates, to John J. Sullivan, mostly to Sullivan—the sticky-handed end. Up the field they went; up to the Mastodons' 20—with the Monsters from Mid-City fighting hard, digging in; then once more, with the Mastodons back on their heels and yelling, "Pass! Pass! Watch that Sullivan! Get that guy, Smith!" And it was Sullivan for the final time, John J. Sullivan, stretching six feet five inches above the level of the sea, racing, cutting through to the end zone.

McTouh was picking off enemy seepers-through in front of Sam, and roaring, his red hair jumping in the wind, "Sammy, boy, if you don't hit the target, I'll personally murder you!"

Sam spotted Sully, the long arms upflung. Sam let it go, bull's-eye, and then the herd that toppled McTouh piled over Sam. It was that tireless, brass voice above the din in the stands that told him Sullivan's fingers had gathered in the ball. And the sound of this mob was just as rousing as any college crowd Sam had ever heard. *That Sully is a great end,* he thought. *All I have to do is get it within a mile of him.* The strain was entirely too much, now. He had to steal a look at the press section of the stands.

Miss Magazane was on her feet waving, and Harry Wrist held his cane high above his head, like a flag-pole. The tension had gotten to them too, all right. It soothed him to know it.

The teams lined up. The long red second-hand on the clock started on its last round. The ball came back

from Weight, beautifully. Sam kicked it through the uprights for another point—and the Bears led their foe, 20 to 7, now.

Suddenly a gun went off somewhere with a blast!

A mob poured onto the field to—among other things—get that ball as a souvenir. A tiny little terrier of a fan, his coattails flying behind him, as he scooted around after that bounding ball, finally got it and went down under an avalanche of humanity. But in due time he appeared again, clothing ruined, and intercepted Sam Smith, as Sam trudged off the field. "Here," the fan said, "I've been wrong about you. . . . You've earned this pumpkin." He gave the ball to Sam and ran away—but not before Sam recognized his deep, loud-like-a-brass-foundry voice!

The afternoon's work was finished. The Bears had won. Presumably, everyone but the Mastodons and their followers, were glad.

IT WAS A small, curiously happy victory gathering in the clubhouse, nestled deep behind the south end of the field.

Bandage, the trainer asked him, when Sam came out of the shower, feeling like a dismantled clock, "How'd you like to have Boulder City as a gift?"

"Your idea, Mr. Bandage, or the citizen's?"

"Right now you could have anything in this city, son."

Sam supposed he would be a local sensation for the few days that the good people would care to recall. He was used to fleeting fame. He dressed and drank a lot of water to replace the perspiration he had lost. He was knotting his necktie when McTouh, wearing a sowl and nothing else, appeared and said in a mock, falsetto voice: "I thought the trend away from neckties was thoroughly established wherever the bon ton gathered?"

In the spirit of the occasion, Sam admitted he had reduced his own celebrated stable of cravats to the bone. "I am now down to 984 ties," said Sam. "You will admit, Red, that any branch line railroad in the country

has more ties than that." McTouh chuckled, slapped Sam on the shoulder and went away to dress.

Then began the speech-making.

There was not a dry eye in the dressing room—at any rate, thanks to the shower water on the floor and the slush outdoors, there was not a dry shoe—when Malachy Counaghan stood with his hand on the shoulder of Sam Smith and beamed upon his hired hands. "I guess you all recognized the ghost of Harry Wrist running for us in the shape of this boy today. I guess you know we've got the greatest scat-back since Harry Wrist—"

"Harry Wrist taught him," McTouh interrupted. "Sam told me that."

The scene was rich in sentiment, but the boys noted that Mr. Counaghan's hand was in such a position that it could sweep in a flash from Sam Smith's shoulder to the too-outspoken McTouh's mouth, if need be. Mr. Counaghan talked of the wonderful plays that Harry Wrist had executed for the pre-war Bears. "Why I remember one play in particular," Mr. Counaghan explained. "Personally, I'd never seen one equal to it before, unless you count one of Shakespeare's—"

McTouh opened his mouth and Mr. Counaghan's hand flew to it—and everyone had a jolly laugh. Mr. Counaghan, like him or not, was a man who handled successful enterprises of all types. If they were not successful when he took them over, they got successful. Just now he reached into his coat pocket and pulled forth a handful of checks, and, calling each hired hand by name, presented him in full, with his due earnings. It was at this stage that Harry Wrist came in, followed by Miss Margaret Magazane.

Giving the last check to McTouh, Mr. Counaghan turned around and said, "You were right Harry. I'm tickled I listened to you. Without Sam, here, we would not have won today."

But then Sam had to speak. He walked a step nearer to his uncle, and, giving him the football that had been used in the game, said, loudly,

so everyone could hear, "The greatest player that ever lived, boys—Harry Wrist! I think, he's proved that without any doubt. Why, nobody could stop him once he got the ball—he could run through any team, better'n Red Grange, even, better'n anybody the game has ever produced..."

Harry Wrist said in an embarrassed voice, "Sam, you talk too much—Take Margie out of here... Go on."

Sam approached Margaret Magazane, while the bull session resumed behind him—football elders and youngsters all yapping with their heads happily together. Sam took Margaret outside.

They descended the steps together. She said, "I suppose you're hungry, Sam. I never knew many athletes who weren't."

"You know one now, sis."

"Are you kidding again?" she looked at him quizzically.

They laughed together. They strolled out of Wrist Municipal Stadium into the cold, biting wind. It was snowing again. Sam put his arm around Margaret to keep her warm. "We're going to have a white Christmas," she said. "Won't that make everything perfect?"

Sam Smith nodded his head.

Unsung Sporting Spots

EVER HEAR of Steamboat Springs, Colo. or Tellico Plains, Tenn.? Vandalia, Ohio, or Wildwood-by-the-Sea, N. J.? Probably not. Yet each is a red-hot U. S. sport spot.

In our vast sportsminded nation we are too apt to think only of the big sports spots, like Yankee Stadium, Soldiers Field, the Rose Bowl. Yet the country, and yes, literally, the rural countryside is studded with stellar small sports spots.

Of all sports spots those that summon the skiers have the most alluring names—and they're as American as the Indian. In addition to Steamboat Springs, Colo., just roll these off your tongue:

Timberline, Ore. and Big Pines, Cal. Ironwood and Iron Mountain and Ishpeming, all in Michigan. Redwing, Minn. and Chippewa Falls, Wis. Pico, Vt. and Laconia, N. H. Snoqualmie Pass, Wash. and Snow Basin, Utah, and Spooner Summit, Nev.

Those are but a dozen of the big-time ski centers, scenes of the nations outstanding ski meets each year.

But skiing doesn't monopolize the small sports spotlight. Take Tellico

Plains, Tenn. Here each November in the beautiful Tennessee Mountains of Cherokee National Forest there takes place one of the nation's most unusual sporting events: the wild boar hunt for the ferocious Prussian boars that were imported years ago from the Black Forest in north Germany.

Or take Vandalia, Ohio. Each year the Grand American Trap Shooting Championships are held here. And Wildwood-by-the-Sea, N. J.? Well the top teen-age tawsters gather here each year to play in the National Marbles Tournament.

Then there's Goshen, N. Y. and Lincoln, Ill., Salem, N. H. and Old Orchard Beach, Me., to name but four of the top-flight spots where the pacers pace and the trotters trot at the big-time harness race meetings each year.

Yes, the list of small-size but decidedly big-shot little sports spots is virtually endless. And, lest we forget, ever hear of Cooperstown, N.Y.? Well, if you haven't, your face should be red. It's merely the place where our national game started, where the first diamond was laid out, and where today is baseball's Hall of Fame. Population? By the 1940 census: 2,599.

John Winters Fleming

Sour - Puss

The crochety gent across the way
Can't even bear my name.
He growls whenever he hears me say
I am going to see a game.

He really gets into a rage,
Says sports are a waste of time;
Then reading his paper, he'll turn the page
To the latest account of crime.

He's never admired a runner's grace,
Nor thrilled to a right on the chin,
But he'll tell you about the armament race
And when war is due to begin.

Averages, percentages, scores and the like
He says he can't understand
But he'll tell you when a depression will strike
And settle over the land.

Famous jockeys, baseball stars
He's never gone to cheer,
But he knows how many cars
Have crashed during the year.

Broadcasted sporting events he hates,
No joy in them he's found,
He'll listen to political candidates
Sling the mud around.

Over the street he casts a pall
He looks the picture of gloom.
Instead of the crack of a bat on a ball
He hears the crack of doom.

He looks on me with pitying eyes
He says I'm the sorry one,
But tho he's learned and sage and wise,
He isn't having much fun.

I know no matter what I do,
The world will be just the same.
In the meantime I will tingle to
The thrill of a bout, or a game.

SID PRESS

Horsehide Has - Beens

by T. W. FORD

(Author of "Gimme That Ball!")

THERE WAS a crashing smash into left, over near center, rising on a line, and it was left fielder Mac Delroy's ball to handle. But Splints Bevers, the Raven center fielder, cut over and back to his right to be ready to cover on the play if necessary. Turning his back on the plate, he raced his slim body along, splinter-like arms and legs flying in his floppy style of running. Actually, it was deceptive looking because he really was gobbling ground. The crowd was a roar and the rival base runner from first was by second, hesitating, ready to dash in. The runner from second was down almost at third. It was the moment when a ball game can be won or lost.

Splints saw the burly, six-foot Delroy twist and lunge on sideward. But as he neared the wall, Delroy broke stride, slowed. And then he was too late; the ball flashed just above his upflung glove, struck the wall, and rebounded back past him. If Delroy hadn't been afraid of hitting the



This is the graveyard, busher, the place where those of us who thought baseball was worth giving everything a guy has to give, to end up. You got a raw deal, and so did we; but we don't care, see — and we don't want any rah-rah stuff from you, so just forget about winning games and take it easy like we do!

fence, he could have pulled it down. Some of the bleacher fans jeered. Delroy stood with a sneer on his broad-jawed brick-hued face.

But Splints, ten yards in back of him, cut over. He scooped up the caroming ball, turned, and unwound

his long thin arm. It was a flat, bulleting throw into the shortstop who'd come out to make the relay. And, with two runs flashing across the plate, the hitter was tearing past second. They trapped him off in a rundown between second and third for the big second out; Splints' hot throw had made that possible.

But the crowd was jeering, and Rafe Lenning on the mound had slammed his glove to the ground, taking a kick at it. It should have been a fly out with, perhaps, the runners advancing a base. But no score. Instead....

Out in center, young Splints Bevers could sense the let-down feeling of the man on the mound, Lenning. Splints knew him fairly well anyway. They'd been teammates together on the Moguls up in the majors when the season had started; now they were down here together with this Class-B club, the Ravens. And this day, Lenning had roused himself from his lethargy to make a real effort. For six innings he had pitched shutout ball while his club got him a single tally; now, because Delroy had refused to risk crashing the wall, the giant left-hander was suddenly a run behind.



Lenning
was great
for awhile,
then he
blew . . .

Gripping Novel of The Diamond

What Splints feared, happened. Lenning let down; he gave up. The next hitter singled. A walk. Then there was a roaring double to right to drive in two more tallies and make it a 4-1 ball game. The third out came when the Raven shortstop made a hot stab at a line drive.

THE CLUB moved into the dugout listlessly. Andy Christy, the skipper, glowered at Delroy from the dugout step. He was a stocky, black-eyed man with mouth down-drawn at the corners, a sour expression. The look of a man who's missed the boat in his life.

"What the hell was the matter with you out there, Delroy? Afraid of denting that wall with your pretty puss?"

Delroy sneered back as he turned to the water cooler. "Misjudged it—that's all. The wind caught it at the last minute. Whatta ya want me to do, give blood for the stinking miser that runs this club?"

Christy had no reply. He just slumped down on the bench as if he knew it would be useless to say anything more, as if he'd given up on doing anything much with this Class-B Northern Plains League club. After all, Christy had given up on himself. He too had been up in the majors, a crack coach slated to be moved into the managerial post when the aging skipper of his club retired. It had happened—and somebody else had been named to take over the reins.

Nobody knew exactly what had happened. Christy had gone sorehead, done a lot of loose talking, bucked the new pilot. The rumor was that he had been denied the post because of some small scandal that had popped out of his past at the last moment. And finally his soreheadedness, his rebellious tactics, his complaints, had been too much. A detriment to the major league team, they had offered him his release as a coach or this small-time job running a minor league club. So here he was, and merely going through the motions of running it—a has-been.

Young Splints Bevers had a sink-

ing sensation as he sat on the bench. He was a has-been himself, a rook the latter part of last season and the first of this with the big league Moguls; now he was down here himself, relegated to the purgatory of this leaky-roof circuit. With no future. But still, it was the instinct of a ball player in him that told him you had to play the game.

The Ravens could do nothing against enemy pitching in the home half. Lenning, pitching sloppily, with that don't-give-a-damn attitude, was reached for a single; he followed it with a walk on four straight pitched balls, gave up two more balls. Christy derricked him. The relief man got the side out with the loss of only one run. In the home half, Splints stepped up there with the wagon tongue with one down. He'd never been a power hitter up in the majors, but he was a smart batsman.

He ran up and faked a bunt, not swinging, on the first one, a high outside pitch. The infielder came in two steps, the third baseman playing very short. Splints fouled the next offering back to the screen. Another ball, a curve on the inside this time that he gauged accurately and checked his swing on, faking a bunt with a choked bat again that time. And then, on the two and one count, the rival hurler came in with his fast one a little above the knees. Which was just what Splints figured.

He had it timed and he punched a quick, hard one past the drawn-in third baseman, made first easily on that wrist hit. The crowd woke up a little as it seemed as if perhaps the Ravens had a threat going with a man on and Delroy, batting Number Three, wagging a big bat at the plate. The hit-and-run sign was flashed after a low pitch, Splints jiggling off first with those long skinny legs of his always in motion. A peg to the bag but he slid back in easily to come to his feet and laugh at the hurler.

Then, the pitch. Splints took off on the motion, digging hard, his ears tuned to catch the sound of the crack of the bat. On the hit-and-run, the batter was supposed to swing at anything short of the atomic bomb to

protect the runner. No crack ever came. As he whipped up the basepath; Splints saw the shortstop swinging over to take the catcher's peg, the short covering the sack against the left-hand hitting Delroy. Splints slid, then the shortstop's glove was banging against his leg before he reached the bag. Out!

THAT WAS the end of the Raven rally, the second out. Delroy finally did pound out a double, but he died on base as the next man was whiffed. Splints cut over toward him as they trotted into the outfield.

"Miss the sign on that hit-and-run, Mac?" he asked.

"Hell no," the tough Delroy came back. "I should risk getting conked, maybe finishing my career, just because these jerks put on the hit-and-run sign? Do they run a free rest home for ball players who get their brains scrambled by an inside fast one? Like hell they do! I learned my lesson once! Nuts!"

Splints couldn't argue. He wasn't even mad at Mac for not swinging to protect him; he understood the reason for the man's attitude. Mac had had a rough deal. And only two years away from being a ten-year man who couldn't be sold down the river to the minors, too, when it happened.

The relief man halted the first two to face him. A walk. The backstop let a low throw squeeze out of his glove and the runner broke for second. There was the throw, the play at the keystone by Chick Rosgrass, the Raven second baseman. It seemed as if he had the runner. Then Rosgrass was rolling on the ground in pain as the ball trickled out behind him; he'd been spiked.

Time was called and players rushed to him. Rosgrass was half carried from the field into the dugout. Splints had run in, and when he saw the gash in Rosgrass' ankle where the base runner's steel had ripped him, he knew it was far more serious than any ordinary cut. Play started again, and the next hitter rifled a sinking liner into center. Splints dug in fast, flung himself at the fast

dropping ball. It could be the big third out.

He couldn't quite nab it; he skidded on his knees, had it caromed off his chest. But he pawed after it fast, came up, and rifled it plateward. The runner on second had hesitated lest he catch it, forgetting there were already two down, so Splints' throw held the man to third base. He moved back to position, walking a little stiffly on his left leg; the knee hurt after that skid.

Delroy had swung over belatedly to back him up. "You chowder-head!" he called. "Trying to break yourself up? Just to make a little catch? Who cares? The club owners stuff their bank accounts with the gate receipts we players pull in. They don't care about you crippling yourself!"

"Aw, forget it," Splints came back.

"And the fans, they'll call you a bum quick enough! They think the price of a ticket includes the right to insult your mother!"

ALMOST AS if on signal, a bleacher fan megaphoned through his cupped hands at Splints Bevers. "Ya big bum, Bevers! Cutwell would uh got that one! Ya big bum!"

That stuff made Delroy sound right. Cutwell, a slowed-down veteran but a man who lugged a big bat to the plate, was the regular center fielder—very popular with the fans, too, after eight years with the club. He was out now with some of his ulcer trouble. But when he got back his health, he'd be returned to the lineup because of fan demand, and Splints would be riding the pine again, a has-been in spades. There didn't seem much sense to knocking himself out.

Then the next hitter teed off on the relief man and thumped a hot shot deep to right center. It curved into right field. But the right fielder had been slow getting out of his tracks. Splints kept going though that injured left knee was stabbed with pain on every stride. He lunged and made the catch that ended the game.

"Ya sap," Delroy said without ven-

om as they headed for the clubhouse out behind left field. "The game was lost anyway! And I could see ya limping as you ran."

"I'm just trying to play ball," the kid, Splints, said. It sounded weak, but it was all he could think of. Sense, reason, plain hard-headed business acumen were lacking from the remark. Yet Splints meant it; he couldn't help but try to play the best baseball in his system....



AFTER HE was dressed, Splints was ready to head downtown to the sidestreet hotel where he and a lot of the club put up, but Delroy suggested a beer. They stopped in at a little tavern a few blocks from the park. A couple of other players were there. Splints himself ordered a coke. Delroy guffawed at him as he lifted a highball to his mouth. Splints himself didn't quite know why he was there except he had an itch, in a vague way, to talk to this other former big leaguer, to try to get him to put on the effort. Then Rafe Lenning the starting pitcher, his former teammate up with the Moguls, came in.

The lank loose-knit Lenning ordered a double shot of straight rye, dumped it down then started to glower at Delroy. "You didn't break your neck trying to get to that one up against the wall, chum, did you?"

Splints figured trouble was brewing. There wasn't much he could do to stop it once it started, he knew. He was lean, bone and flat muscles, about a hundred and sixty odd pounds of him. He was quick as a rabbit on his feet, a narrow-faced kid with a determined mouth and short-cropped black hair and long, narrow, dark eyes that mirrored the intensity with which he did anything he tried. Sort of nice-looking, especially when he smiled, though that was seldom these days. And yet, somehow, there was a mature look about him. Back of the features was a bitterness, a stamp of disillusionment, the aura of a man

who's been to the top of the ladder and lost out.

But if he had to try to pry apart the burly two-hundred pound Mac Delroy and the rangy-shouldered, powerful pitcher, Lenning, he wouldn't have a prayer, he knew. Splints started to say something in his quick staccato voice about the breaks of the game. But Delroy pulled the cigar from his mouth, nodded to Lenning and snorted: "You're damn right, pal; I didn't break my neck. Why should I? Did you ever hear of a club owner pensioning off a ball player who got crippled outa his career playing the game for said owner?"

The tall Lenning signalled for a refill, nodding thoughtfully "You're right, Mac. You're right.... I guess I just got ambitious and hopeful this afternoon. No sense in killing yourself out there."

"Now you ain't whistling through Dixie," Delroy said, shoving a bill over to pay for another round of drinks. "Baseball's nothing but a hard-boiled dollars-and-cents business to the guys who run the game. So why should we guys who play it act any other way but the way they do? Why—"

The thin-limbed Splints rubbed his long jaw and put in a word. "Baseball is a business, sure; it's gotta be a business to pay our salaries. But if there isn't competition on the field, there'd be no business. Fans wouldn't come around just to see exhibitions of skill. And—"

"Hear, hear," chimed in the saturnine Lenning.

"Our eager-beaver Boy Scout sounds off," said Delroy.

Splints fumed out cigaret smoke angrily "But the fans gotta feel every player is giving with all he's got—and trying—or they won't come out to watch 'em!" he insisted. "And if they don't come out, there'll be no jobs for us! Don't you see? What kind of work would you guys rather do?"

Lenning dumped down his second double shot and raked his corn-yellow hair. "Clipping the dividend coupons of the owners! That's what I'd

rather do, Splints. Now you know."

"Me, I'd be willing to work my hands to the bone counting the gate receipts—and taking my cut," the outfielder guffawed. "Have a drink, kid, and get back your boyish laughter!"

SPLINTS WAS trying to think up an answer when Buddy Parpul, second-string Raven catcher, came into the place. He had news. "Hear about Rosgrass' ankle? Report just came in from the hospital. X-rays show a broken bone. He'll be out two-three weeks at least. Brother, is this club hitting the skids to hell fast! Give me a Manhattan, Joe."

That was the general attitude of the club under Christy, Splints knew. And when he heard Mac Delroy propose a toast to last place, even though he instinctively resented it, he couldn't blame the big left fielder too much. He knew Delroy's story, just as he knew Rafe Lenning's; they had both gotten rough enough breaks to disillusion any man about the game.

Delroy had been a regular with the major league Bruins. A big powerhouse player, hard to handle a man insolently careless about training rules. He travelled with a fast crowd off the field, was seen around the race tracks. Then two things had happened within close proximity to each other. He'd smashed into the wall going after a drive. The injury hadn't seemed especially serious, but the experts began to notice. Delroy's throwing arm, the left, wasn't what it used to be. He wasn't rifling it like he used to any more. The second thing was a minor scandal.

A Midwest bookie, an ex-racketeer with a criminal record, was exposed as trying to bribe a minor league hurler. The bookie's personal records were grabbed by a smart reporter, and Mac Delroy's name was down in his book. Down with a notation after it indicating that Delroy owed him over three thousand in betting debts. The ball player had been seen in public with the bookie many times, too.

THE CLUB acted promptly though Delroy claimed these were only horse bets. But it had been emblazoned in headlines in the local sheets, and the Bruins had a hard and fast rule against a member of the club betting on the bangtails. They cleaned house to show the public major league ball would not stand for any kind of a scandal. Delroy and a utility infielder were shipped down to the minors, Delroy to this Raven outfit, even though there was no concrete evidence against him. There was no question of a trade, of him making a deal for himself to go to any other major league club. They simply stopped one step short of running him out of the game completely.

"The dirty no-good rats!" the outfielder had ranted to the press at the time. "This is a cover-up! They figure my wing is slipping, going to get worse, so they're just using this as an excuse to unload me!" And now he was with the Ravens flaunting training rules whenever he saw fit, his bat at times looking very potent in this Class-B baseball. And only going through the motions on the field, refusing to risk any further injury.

No, Splints couldn't blame him. He picked up the fresh coke Lenning had ordered. The tall pitcher was having another highball "Here's 10 hits, runs and errors," Lenning toasted sardonically. "One of these days maybe I won't fade in the closing frames!"

And Splints didn't blame him, either, although he realized that if Lenning didn't drink so much he would be in condition to be strong at the finish. But the one-time grinning, easy-going Rafe Lenning had had a tough break, too. Up with the Moguls with Splints himself, control was the only thing between the promising hurler and stardom. He had power, a sharp curve. The experts said it was just a matter of time and experience. Then Lenning's young cute wife had left him—fallen in love with another man, the rumor had it.

Lenning had blown. Sky high. His control grew as wobbly as a drunk on crutches. In spots, he might be

brilliant for a few innings. Then something would go amiss; perhaps the defense would open a leak behind him. And he'd go berserk, wild pitching repeatedly. The Moguls tried to straighten him out, waited for the storm to pass, but Lenning began to hit the bottle hard, to go on extended bouts with Old John Barleycorn. He'd disappear for two and three days. Several times he failed to report at the park when his regular pitching turn had come around. And finally, returning to the hotel on the road one night and being accosted by the manager, in his drunken condition, Lenning had struck him, knocking out two teeth. Then he'd proceeded to try to tear the lobby apart. It had taken the police to tame him.

THAT HAD been the end of Lenning as a big leaguer. There was no question of trades or deals in this case, either. No other big-time club was interested in a bottle baby. The Moguls' Class Triple A and Double A farms were stocked with promising youngsters, coming up, not going like a pitcher who's life has been blasted by tragedy. So it had been the Class-B Ravens for Lenning; and for Splints Bevers himself at almost the same time.

He'd been the second-string center fielder for the Moguls, the youngster predicted to fill the aging Les Drillon's shoes. They'd been using him off and on, playing him a week, then benching him to let him loosen up when Drillon was refreshed from a rest. Splints' hitting had not been so hot, but he could rove that center field pasture like an antelope. And when he did get a hit, he could grab that extra base. Was a constant menace on the sacks anyway. And then he'd been sent down. The official story, according to the newspapers, was that a major league club couldn't gamble on going along with a man so weak with the stick. But Splints himself knew the real story.

His mouth twisted quickly once at the thought of it. Lenning might just possibly straighten out and become a pitcher again. Mac Delroy, well, there might be a break for him. May-

be somehow that gambler-connection smirch might be erased and he would go back up. After all, he did have fire-power in that big bat of his. But as for himself—

"Hey, why the drizzle-puss look?" yelled Lenning, pounding Splints on the back. "Have a real drink and cheer up, pally! What the hell—'We're just poor little lambs who've gone a-stray....'" And he launched into the Yale Whiffingpoof song.

A customer passing Splints said, "Yep, just got the word. Cutwell will be back in center for the Ravens tomorrow."

"So what?" the other, another sports reporter said. "They get back one man and lose another. Rosgrass at second. And who've they got to replace him? The kid, Bailey, from Elkton, he can't make the double play. And there's nobody else."

Splints' mouth had squeezed up hard. Cutwell coming back meant the bench for him. And if he continued to ride that bench, there'd be little chance of him holding on with this club after the season's end. Then his sharp alert eyes narrowed as an idea funnelled into his mind.

It was a long-shot possibility. The odds stacked heavily against him. But Splints Bevers was the breed who'd buck the tide from here or in sooner than give up. Even though about everybody else had given up on him, it seemed. "Bailey is no great shakes with that stick," he said softly in the general din. "Goes for too many bad pitches.... Maybe...."

Lenning was getting in a bellicose mood, now arguing heatedly with a stranger on his left. Splints suggested to Mac that they go. The left fielder shook his head. "Run along if you crave to, Boy Scout. But the Right Honorable Lord Delroy intends to take more liquid cargo aboard."

Splints played it smoothly. "I need your help, Mac. I got to get Rafe out of here, and I'm not big enough to do it alone. See?"

Despite his tough-looking exterior, Delroy was a big-hearted guy inside. He immediately acceded, told Lenning they were going somewhere else. They got the pitcher into a cab

and down to the side street hotel, up to his room. Lenning dropped on the bed, not quite out. They got off his coat and paps, removed his shoes. And then Splints saw the tears leaking from the guy's eyes. Silent tears with no chokes or sobs. And he knew the poor devil was thinking of that wife who'd walked out on him.

"Okay, we'll go out and get another drink," Delroy said.

Splints shook his head. "Count me out... There's a game tomorrow, anyway. Remember, mister?"

Delroy guffawed. "You're a funny guy, Splints."

The next forenoon, during the workout, Splints got himself at second base with the substitute infield. He had played at short for a brief period in his semi-pro days before he'd been converted into an outfielder because of his feather feet. Playing second wasn't as difficult as he expected; after a short while, the pivot on the double-play setup seemed to come natural to him....



AS HE FIGURED, Splints rode the bench the next afternoon with the crowd-pleaser, Cutwell, back in center. The rock, Bailey, was at the keystone. It wasn't much of a game, the Ravens going about things in their usual listless way. But the opposing hurler suddenly lost his stuff in the third, gave up two walks in a row. And then the Raven bats went to work on him. Even don't-give-a-hang players have no objection to fattening batting averages when the opportunity offers. When the smoke cleared in that frame, the home club had a nice fat seven runs.

The visitors chipped and chiselled away. Going into the eighth, it was a 7-5 ball game. Then the aging Cutwell failed to get in fast enough on a sinking liner that went for a single. Next, young Bailey messed up a double-play, dropping the shortstop's flip in his hurry to pivot on second base. Andy Christy cursed angrily, then called time. "Go in at center for Cutwell, Bevers," he ordered Splints.

The skipper was strengthening his club defensively to protect the lead.

Splints had only one chance that frame, an easy fly. The Ravens got out of it with the loss of but one run, went into the ninth with still the lead. One visitor went down. There was a ripper between first and second. Bailey made a valiant try, knocked it down. But he had a tough throw to make off balance; it was high, pulling Bill Vinson off the first base sack. And the runner was safe. Then there was a blast through the box with the hit-and-run on, the runner breaking. Bailey got in front of the ball and then, nervous from his last miscue, let it go through him.

The crowd howled and the enemy baserunner, blazing toward third, got the sign from the coach to go all the way. It looked like the tying run. But nobody had noticed how the alert Splints, playing a short center field out there, had broken like a greyhound when the ball was hit. Charging in at top speed to back up second, he scooped up the rolling ball in the outfield and winged it into the plate. The enemy runner was out by a couple of yards. Then the Raven hurler got the next man to pop and the game was over.

Christy gave Splints a long look and a quick nod, but that was all. In the clubhouse, nobody congratulated him for the play that had possibly saved the ball game. They did some chortling over their fat hitting, dressed quickly, eager to get away like workers from a sweatshop. Splints himself sat for some time on a bench, swathed in a sweater, not even undressing at first. He felt bitter.

It wasn't over his own tough break. It was the matter of playing with an uninspired bunch of guys like this club. He knew he himself had no great future in baseball. But it still ran against the grain for him to be on a club lacking in competitive fire. It was an instinct in him to *try* to win, at least.

RIDING INTO the city from the ball park on the bus, he mulled it over. The Ravens had quite a few

has-beens, men who'd been up there and were now coming down the ladder. They had others who were just fair minor leaguers, not going anywhere. It was a 'poor franchise; salaries were low. The only thing that was keeping the owners' heads above water was their working arrangement with the Moguls. But still, the solemn Splints figured, if they got hot and played alert aggressive ball, they could do something in their circuit. That would draw the fans, make the club a going proposition.

There'd be nothing in it for him, Splints knew, but he was that kind of a guy. And there was only one key to the situation that he could see. If Mac Delroy and Lenning could be fired up, roused enough to keep in shape and give their best out on that field, it might start the ball rolling. Delroy with his big bat was well above the class of ball played in this circuit. And if Rafe Lenning could be pulled together and gotten to pitch again, he could be the bell mare to get the Ravens into winning ways. Let a club cop a few and no matter how pepleless a team it might be, the men get hungry for more wins, begin to think they've got something.

He dropped into a movie alone that evening. Coming home he ran into Lenning on a corner. The tall pitcher pretty tight, sleepy-eyed, was handing a bill to a panhandler. Splints looked, saw it was a ten-spot, and snatched it, shoved it in Lenning's coat pocket.

Rafe bridled. "What the hell is this?" he demanded, thick-voiced. "If I want to give a poor devil a buck—"

"That was a tenner, Rafe," Splints calmed him as he gave the bum some silver. "Come on along. Time we hit the hay, kid."

Lenning walked along but then insisted he had to have another drink. Just one more, he said. Splints got him to swear he'd check into the hotel after having it, then they went into a nearby tavern. The hurler had a double bourbon. Splints stuck to his coke. He knew how alcohol took it out of a man's legs, and his own speed wasn't what it used to be.

LENNING put down his drink and fumbled with a cigaret. "Think I'll ask for my release and quit baseball," he muttered, face working. "Maybe I'll just walk out and go some place where I'm not known and get a job."

"You've got a job—and a future—if you wanted to work at it." Splints told him stiffly. "When do you wake up? Are you going to let some dizzy dame blast your whole life?"

Lenning turned on him bellicosely. "Don't you dare call Paula a dizzy dame, dammit! She's wonderful." He fumbled in a pocket, brought out an air mail letter. "Heard from her today. She isn't so sure she's going to marry this other guy now. She said there was no rush about the divorce if I was hard up for dough. . . . She's swell girl even if she did leave me and don't love me no more." He slapped the letter down on the bar.

Splints said, "All right. That isn't bad news."

"Aw, hell! I'm a bum. Maybe she was right to walk out. I can't pitch any more. Splints. . . . Maybe I could uh been great once. I don't know. I don't know." He shook his head. A man twisted deep in an emotional hurricane. "With you, it's different. They dropped you down because you were too light with the stick. Me—I really thought I had something once. Once. . . ."

"You still got it, Rafe—but you're kicking it around. If you'd stop being a dumb bottle baby, you could pitch again. And you'd have major league scouts riding the rails down here for a peek at you."

Rafe Lenning stared into the back bar mirror a long moment, fingering his beard stubble. "You really think that, kid?"

"I know it," Splints said sharply. "Not think. I *know*. You still got that portside arm. Paula didn't take that when she walked out on you. . . . Well, let's mosey." He took the hurler's arm.

Lenning pulled away. "I can walk myself home alone. All right. I give you my word I'm going back to the hotel."

"Sure, chum," Splints humored him.

"And remember—you still own that arm.... Give me another coke, bartender." He watched the hurler walk out with a new air of self confidence in his bearing, not shambling now. Splints drank up his coke, then saw that envelope, the letter from Paula, that Lenning had left on the bar. He picked it up.

He just happened to note the postmark, a small town in Indiana, Sastecko. The letter itself had slipped part way from the envelope. Splints deliberately read what lines he could. He read, "*—and please take care of yourself. You can get back into the majors yet. I'm sorry for what I did, for what happened. But those things happen in life. Please don't drink, Rafe. And good luck to you.*" Splints pocketed the letter, figuring to give it to Rafe tomorrow. Then he went home.

WHEN HE arose the next morning, he looked at the envelope again. On the back was the return address, *Paula Reblee Lenning, 18 Moss Street, Sastecko*. He remembered seeing her once, in a box at a game when he was with the Moguls, a little slip of a brunette thing as cute as a new penny. Out at the clubhouse, he turned the letter over to the pitcher.

In the forenoon drill, he again inserted himself at second base with the substitute pick-up infield as the regulars batted. Delroy asked him about it in the dugout.

"What's the big idea, kid? You must like to work."

Splints just gave him a blank look, shrugged. Said something about watching his weight. He rode the bench throughout the game that afternoon as the Ravens reverted to form and dropped it. Delroy played extremely sloppy ball, as slow as a truckhorse out there in left, twice playing hits into extra bases. It was a tied-up 3-3 ball game as they went into the eighth. The first hitter banged out a double. And Andy Christy brought in Lenning whom he had dispatched to the bullpen earlier.

Splints watched him closely from

the dugout as he took his warm-up tosses, and he had hope. Lenning was angry, insulted, face a grim red hue, at being relegated to bullpen duty. After all, he'd been a major league starting hurler once. A deliberate walk. Then he stopped one hitter, holding that runner to second as he wheeled a called third strike over the plate. Then he got the next man, a dangerous pinch hitter to push a double-play ball down to second. And young Bailey, over-eager and nervous, threw wild to the shortstop covering the bag.

One run, the tie-breaking tally, scurried across. Base runners on second and third. Lenning cracked wide open; he walked the next man on four pitches to load them up, wild as a steer. Christy had to bring in old Pop Gowley to replace him. The game ended that way, a 4-3 defeat for the Ravens in a game they might have won.

"Well, we scared 'em," said Monty Horn the catcher laughingly in the showers.

Splints had to use will power to keep his lip buttoned up. A ball club, to him, that didn't mind defeat was in a bad way. Somebody down the line said: "What's this whispering about somebody out to buy this club? They tell it that he's in the cosmetic business."

"He must be outa his head too." chimed in another player. "Anybody who'd want to put up dough for this bunch of bums—haw!"

Splints moved out from under the water and picked up his towel. "Maybe he plans to jack up the stands and move a whole new club inside the park," he threw at them hotly. "A club with some moxie!" He stalked out.

The next day he worked out a the keystone again in the pre-game drill. He'd just scooped a tricky grounder, charging it fast and whipping the ball off his chest to first. And Andy Christy came up in back of him.

"Ever play second before, Bevers?" he asked in his weary voice.

"Sure. Quite some, mister. Do I look that green at it?" He was running a bluff. He didn't say that his

keystone experience had been a matter of a few brief weeks back in his semi-pro days in an industrial league before he'd made the jump into the Mogul chain.

"Maybe you'd be steadier than Bailey," the pilot said. "Start at second today, Bevers."



SPLINTS crowded inside. He had hoped for this, figured it could happen when he knew Rosgrass would be out for quite a period. Yet, he was scared when he took the field with the pitcher throwing to the lead-off Hawk hitter. But everything was all right in that frame with no chances for him as the first man skied to right, the second dribbled to the mound, and the third fouled out to rangy Monty Horn. In the second frame, he gobbled a ground ball efficiently. Then with a runner on first, there was a hard shot to Chink Brown at short.

Splints took the throw for the forceout at second, dancing off the bag a split instant later to avoid the spikes of the incoming runner. Spun. But his hurried throw to first was a little wide, pulling Vinson off the sack. The next hitter doubled to drive home the runner from first. The crowd booed Splints Bevers as he came off. The disillusioned Raven fans loved to boo somebody to vent their disgust. The ex-Mogul tried not to let it get him down. But in the next frame, when a ground ball took a pebble hop over his shoulder, making it look as if he'd erred, he almost cracked at the unfamiliar position. The runner who got on thanks to that break was worked around for the second Hawk score.

"What the devil," said the veteran Brown offhandedly as they trotted into the dugout. "We aren't supposed to win too many, are we? But, one thing, Splints, you don't boot 'em as fancy as Bailey could." A chuckle.

That seared Splints, but by the time he took the field for the fourth, he had reacted, had his answer to the situation. He'd decided to take over command of that infield, to be the

boss man. When Spider Ray on the mound, began to falter after hitting the first batter, it was Splints who was in there, bolstering him verbally. Ray looked at him in surprise, then nodded, and did steady do'n. He got the batter but the runner advanced to second. Then there was a hopper to the left of short. Chink Brown was slow getting out of his tracks and only succeeded in knocking it down and a few feet behind him. Runners safe at second and third.

"Wake up there!" Splints snapped at him. "You can't go daisy-picking on a ball field, stupid! Let's have some pepper—everybody!"

The rest of the infield blinked his way. Then Vinson did call something to Spider Ray. And Brown, flushing at being needled by this non-regular, spat cotton and cried: "Watch me on the next one!" He did make a nice stab of a rising liner, then flipped to Splints to get the runner caught off the bag.

In the next frame, when the opposition worked a man around to the hot corner with one down, the alert Splints sized up the situation. Christy had given his club no sign so the infield was back, hoping for the D.P. killing with one down. Splints thought fast. The man at the plate, a rival infielder, was a light hitter, he recalled. He checked the man's feet, saw he was up on the balls of them, not set to swing. It was going to be a squeeze bunt, he was sure. Then he was waving the infield in a couple of steps to be set to make the play at the plate. If it was a bunt there'd be little chance of a twin killing anyway. They obeyed, figuring he must have got the sign from the pilot.

It was. Up the first baseline. And a low pop-up bunt. Vinson, in short on Splints' say-so, dashed forward a few steps, took it on the fly, then whipped the ball to third for the out on the runner who'd been breaking for the plate on the motion. The fans actually applauded the Ravens for once.

THEY DIDN'T pull out the game, but Splints Bevers had a feeling of some satisfaction when he trotted

off the field at the end. He'd made a credible performance himself though going hitless. Yet at bat he had laid down a perfect sacrifice on order to advance a runner. And he had pulled that infield up on its toes somewhat. In the clubhouse, Delroy lounged over after his shower, scratching a hair-matted chest. There was a note of new respect in his voice. "Pretty smart apple, aren't you, kid? Read the old writing on the wall, huh? I thought you was a sap to take that extra drill at second base. But you got yourself back in the lineup. Pretty smart. And I'm betting you'll be in there tomorrow."

Splints was. His keystone play was no model of perfection; a couple of times he was caught out of position though Brown began to tip him on how to play the various hitters. The short, sudden hop of the ball at close range as compared to handling ground hits in the outfield was tough for him. But he was always in there driving, never letting the ball get the jump on him. Playing them on the carom off his chest and shoulders at times. Snatching the loose horsehide when it did rebound from his body. And he had a natural trigger-quick throw that aided him in converting what might have been scored as errors into putouts.

He missed up on one double-play chance, but almost immediately atoned for the miscue by a brilliant pickup of a ball that skidded off the hurler's shin and making a bullseye peg to the plate to nip the runner coming in. The crowd gave him a real hand. And another when his single, punched through the gap between first and second, brought in a runner from second. In the eighth, though, Christy yanked him for a pinch hitter with the game tied up. But he gave Splints a quick slap on the shoulder when he called him back to the dugout from the plate. With half a break, the ex-major leaguer knew he had that berth at second tied down until Rosgrass returned, at least.

BUT THE satisfaction was pretty thin to spread over the bitter blow that had been dealt his diamond

career. The knowledge that never again would he be in the majors. And playing sporadically with a down-at-the-heel fireless club like the Ravens extended little chance of even advancing himself in the minors. He was dispirited that night as he hung around the lobby listening to the barbering of the other players. There was more talk concerning the persistent rumors a wealthy manufacturer was interested in taking over the Raven franchise. Somebody had even come up with his name, Hubert Turner.

"And he makes cosmetics for the fraus," Monty Horn snorted. "Oh, baby, I'll bet he's a la-de-da! If he got in we'd probably have to perfume our uniforms.... Hey, Splints, why the long puss?"

Splints summoned up a quick grin. "I was just remembering that lousy peg of yours into the dirt in the fifth today when I covered the bag on the steal, Monty."

The hook-nosed catcher guffawed without rancor. "What the heck, I could've thrown it into center field! Cutwell was taking his usual mid-game siesta out there anyway." There were some laughs.

There it was again, Splints thought, as he moved off. Nobody expected much of this bunch, and they certainly expected nothing of themselves. He went to bed in a depressed mood, and the next morning, reading the local paper over breakfast in the coffee shop, he got another dig. Jay Johnston, leading local baseball scribe, in his daily column, quoted a piece of a story of a New York City sports writer regarding the Moguls. And Splints itself.

Right now, the quotes read, the Mogul management must fervently wish they had kept Splints Bevers in the fold with the way Al Mosher is going in center. Mosher looked like the answer when purchased from Trenton. And he does pack extra-base power in that war club. But between his prediliction for hitting into double-plays and for kicking around ground balls in the out-

field, it's questionable how valuable he is today. He cost the club yesterday's game with his eighth inning two-out boot after, just three days ago, doing about the same thing in Boston. Splints Bevers would have gobbled that kind of stuff. Of course, now, everybody knows why the scrappy rookie was sent down. Following a foot fracture during the winter, an operation was necessary to remove a piece of his cracked heel-bone. And this spring, specialists engaged by the club reported that Bevers would never be as fast again. And that it was probable the cut-down heel in time would give under the strain of playing ball day in and day out. The Moguls had no choice, of course. You can't build a future club with slowed-down rooks who in time may be half crippled. But right now, the Moguls could use Bevers till Mosher settles down....

Jay Johnston's comment was: "Well, Splints Bevers is playing some pretty good ball for us."

IT SHOULD have been flattering, but Splints was pale, upset. It brought all the heartbreak back. Dredged up the memories, all the frustration of a career blighted before it really got under way. It had been during the winter that he'd broken the foot in a fall during a blizzard. Later, an operation to remove the smashed portion of the heel bone. In the Arizona spring training camp he discovered he'd lost a notch of his speed, that he didn't have that extra step on the ball anymore. Then he'd begun to limp slightly under the strain of the first training drills.

The club had immediately become suspicious. But by sheer determination, by using his head more than ever to get the jump on the ball, he managed to look good. And then, a short while after the season had opened, he injured the foot again sliding into the plate. They'd sent him down to Johns-Hopkins, and the medical ex-

perts there had handed down the hope-shattering verdict. Never would he recover his old speed and there would always be the danger of the foot giving way under the strain of sustained play. The word had gotten out around the league. No other club wanted a player in his questionable condition, and the Moguls weren't stringing with an as yet unproven rookie who might be crippled at any time.

It had been down to these Ravens for him.

He shoved the paper away, his long eyes hardened against self pity. He expected no miracles. While still fast, he realized he lacked his incredible bursts of speed of last season. That he would never recover the ability to practically leap out of his shoes. He'd tried to keep the fact locked in the background, tried to make himself the best ball player possible with the Ravens. And now it was all brought back....

The first reaction was a surprise and came immediately. A copy of the same morning daily under his arm, Mac Delroy came over to the table and pinched one of his shoulders. "Just saw Johnston's column, Splints. I never knew just why you'd been sent down before," he growled, trying to keep the emotion from his voice. "You sure got guts to keep on trying, kid. I thought I was the only one who'd got a tough break. But—you got guts. And old Mac's always with a guy who packs the real moxie."

Out at the clubhouse, big Rafe Lening stopped by his locker with a sort of sheepish look. He'd seen the quotes from the New York writer, too, in the local paper.

"Hey, Splints, I always figured you was sent down just because you couldn't make the grade. But now—" He tossed away his cigaret. "Shucks, lemme tell you, I think you're just as fast as ever. I'm pulling for you, fella."

It made Splints Bevers feel some better. And taking the field later, it came to him that he'd won the respect and admiration of these two older

bigger figures in baseball. That he had a kind of hold over them....

5

LENNING pitched that afternoon, the last game before they entrained on a road trip. With one down, he was suddenly rapped for a single, then wobbled and gave a free ticket to first. Calling time, Splints, simply taking over as boss of that infield, ran into the mound. "Rafe, get sense. No hurler's arm was ever ruined by a woman yet! You got your flipper. Only the hitters can beat you—if you let 'em. Don't go yellow!"

Lenning scowled. "Yella? Don't say that about me, you—"

"It's up to you, Rafe," Splints cut him short. "You can use a woman as an alibi—or pitch ball."

Lenning colored, then settled down to work and began to find that plate. A nice catch by the right fielder against the wall took him part way out of the hole. And he got the next man to roll out to short. But in the second frame, though he was trying, he got in a real jam. A hot single followed by a boot by the third sacker put two on with none down. Splints saw the pitcher's rangy shoulders sag.

Brown dug up a deep shot to short that took a high slow bounce at the last moment. The relay to Splints on second. His brain was clicking in high. The hitter was a feather-footed speedster. But the man going from second to third was the rival catcher, a leaden-legged guy. And Splints was facing third. He uncorked it to the hot corner; his throw beat the catcher's slide by a foot for the double play and wiped out the immediate scoring threat.

"Yah! Yah!" cried the usual silent Lenning from the hill. He shifted his wad of gum and even grinned a little. And then he settled down to pitch hard, with a new chunk of confidence.

He went through the seventh, holding the opposition scoreless while the Ravens garnered two. But in the

eighth he tired. After all, with his bottle fighting, he was in no condition. They touched him for one tally. The next two men hit. And Andy Christy relieved Lenning with old Pop Gowley. Pop fed them the soft stuff, cutie-balled them to hold them for two innings. And the Ravens walked off victors with the win to Rafe Lenning's credit.

SPLINTS was hopeful as they caught the train out of town. Even though Chick Rosgrass, the regular second sacker, was making the trip. His ankle was mending faster than expected. He might go back in somewhere along the road jaunt. But Splints had almost forgotten himself. That was an important win, moving the club up to fifth place. And it might serve to renew Rafe Lenning's self faith, to get him set on the road back.

Rain washed out one contest and they split the remaining two games with the flashy Bisons. In the final contest, breaking up a double play after getting on first, Splints dived headfirst into Ackers, the Bison short covering the keystone. Splints did take him out of the play, rolling him hard. When Ackers picked himself up, he had an injured knee and had to leave the game. The rough sullen shortstop spat at Splints' feet.

"The next time it'll be on me, sweetheart!" he barked with some appropriate oaths tacked on. "And you'll be picking your front teeth outa your tonsils, see?"

Splints only grinned it off. They left that city to tie into the Chicks, Lenning going again for the Ravens. Splints could see he was moody, unusually depressed. He had stuff and good control though. Then, with it a 1-1 game, in the fifth, a boot upset him. The runner was picked off on an attempted steal. But Lenning gave up two hot singles. Horn signed the dugout Lenning had nothing left. A reliever was brought in. A run was scored by the Chicks. In the seventh, Splints tied it up again with a sharp single with a runner on second. It became the relief man's ball game to

win or lose. He went on to win.

Splints asked Rafe what had happened after dinner that evening. The big hurler was plainly in the dumps. He shrugged. "Woman trouble again... Paula had relatives in this burg. We visited here once. So coming here now, brings it all back again."

Delroy, who'd been stopped cold by Chick pitching that afternoon, suggested a drink. They went out. But at the entrance to a bar, Lenning said he didn't feel so good and guessed he'd go back to the hotel. Mac and Splints got in a booth and the former began to lap up whiskey. But fast. Splints suggested he slow down; there was a contest the next day.

"Aw, I got a bad head. Hangover, kid... What the hell difference does it make? I'm going nowhere. Now if I was a young hot kid like that Flingman, that Chick third baseman—aw, hell!"

The quick-witted Splints remembered a bit of information he'd overheard during the day concerning this Flingman. A scout of the Dodger organization was said to be in town for a looksee at him. Splints told Mac

"Sure, to take a gander at Fling—that a Dodger scout was watching the games. man, probably."

Splints answered indirectly. "Didn't you know the Bums are on the trail of a hard-hitting left fielder since those injuries scrambled up their picket line?"

Delroy's heavy face lifted from his drink. "Yeah? That so?... Nuts! With that gambler-tieup smear against me, I'd never have a chance to get back in the majors."

Splints said quietly, "You know your hands were clean, Mac... Some day the thing might be cleared up. Then, if you were playing hot ball..."

The outfielder fussed around with his cigar for a couple of minutes, weighing things. "My hands were clean," he muttered once. Then he suddenly finished off his drink and rose. "Let's take a good long walk and turn in..."

565

THEY DID drop the getaway game with the Bisons, moved on for their next series. But Delroy drew a walk, got himself a tremendous triple, and was robbed of a base hit another time, as he bore down. On the train that night, Splints listened to the team chatting in the club car. And there was a new note in their chatter. They weren't champions or anything like it, but they'd found they could win ball games. The in-field play was a lot tighter, sharper. And they were thinking in terms of possible victories, not pre-accepted defeats. As one player put it:

"Sure, the Little Injuns," the next club they were to meet, "they got slick pitching. But there isn't a pitcher who's never been licked. If we can hold them off till we get the wood to their hurlers..."

They copped the opener with a ninth inning rally, an un-heard of thing for the lethargic Ravens. That was after Splints had taken the heart out of a Little Injun surge in the eighth, with the game knotted up, by legging it halfway back into right field to pull down a blooper tabbed for a hit. Dropped the second. But took the third and getaway game when Lenning was sent to the mound again. He was strong till the sixth when he got shaky. By that time the Ravens, playing live scrappy ball, had mounted up a six-run lead for him. He did stagger through.

On the train that night in the club car, they picked up a radio sports broadcast from the home city. One of his remarks was, "Big Rafe Lenning, after today's win, seems to be returning to his major league form again. He's had a lot of control and throws the ball right down the throats of the hitters in the clutch. Let him keep up that pace and some major league club will be making a bid for him soon."

LENNING put down his half eaten sandwich, fired up a cigaret and stared out the car window

at the summer night. Splints noticed his lips were white and compressed. Monty Horn, the backstop, sitting across the table asked Rafe why he was trembling. The hurler failed to answer. After a couple of minutes, he left and went down to the booth where Delroy was, in a fast game of knock rummy. They exchanged some whispered words. Delroy threw in his cards and the pair left the club car.

After a few seconds, Splints eased out after them. He felt like a dirty spy. But he was worried about Lenning. Back in the Pullmans he found the pair sitting on the berth of Delroy's made-up lower. And Delroy had a bottle. "Hello, Hawkshaw," the outfielder greeted Splints, scowling.

"Sherlock Holmes to you," Splints came back good-naturedly. "I smelled a drink in the offing. And I need one myself tonight," he added to make it look good. And he did take a quick snort. "What's eating you, Rafe?" he went on offhandedly. "Why the home city scribes are beginning to tout you as on your way back?"

Lenning cursed hoarsely. "That's just it. That's what's got me scared. I haven't got that kind of stuff any more." He raked his hair. "Down here, maybe I can get by if I cut the booze and keep women outa my mind. I'd be satisfied to stay here. Hell!" He was going through emotional torture. "And Kranz the coach tipped me a while ago Christy plans to pitch me in the first game when we get home—the one against the Bisons. And that game can mean the first division for us. The damn pressure'll be on... All I want to do is to earn my living as just another ball player—not a star again!"

Splints remained silent. Lenning looked at the bottle in the berth, then stood up quickly and said he was turning in. Mac Delroy followed his back with his eyes as the hurler went down the aisle. "Shucks, he's going crazy, huh?" Splints still remained silent.

He understood. Lenning had pulled himself together somewhat, was

struggling to pitch fair ball. But never again would he have real deep-rooted confidence in himself, the belief that he could overpower real hitters at the plate. His wife leaving him had been a terrific blow, had shattered his self esteem. The odds were against his getting it back on the diamond. A woman can do such things to a man.

DELROY checked the aisle both ways, then hoisted the bottle to his face again. Splints said: "Thought you were easing off on that stuff, Mac."

Delroy gave with a mild Bronx cheer, laughed sarcastically. "That Dodger scout never gave me any tumble... Maybe he wasn't there at all. Maybe it was just a hot dream of yours, pally. Huh? Nuts! Why try?"

Splints dead-panned it and told a neat little white lie. "You expect 'em to go on one look, fathead? Sure he was there. Might be taking another look during this last road series too... Then they'll have another scout from their organization taking his look when we get back home. Those Dodgers gotta get themselves an outfielder with power."

Delroy's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How come you know so much, kid? Where do you get all this info?"

Splints stalled by exhaling cigaret smoke, then came up with an addition to the white lie. "I used to be pals with one of the Bison coaches when I was in the minors before going to the Moguls, Mac. He tipped me."

"Oh... Yeah? Well, a coach oughta know, too, I guess..." He turned to drop the bottle into his bag.

"Wanted, position as wet nurse. Experienced in handling difficult cases," Splints told himself as he turned in later. He shut his mind against his own worries. Wearing a special brace, Rosgrass, the regular second sacker, had joined in the pregame drill that day....



SPLINTS' Bevers' fears were realized as they opened the last two-game series on the road. Rosgrass, the veteran, took over at the keystone. The Ravens won thanks to a terrific home-run clout by Delroy in the eighth following his three-run double in the sixth. He was really bearing down. But the infield work lacked sharpness and cohesiveness. Rosgrass was a first-class fielder and a stronger man at the plate than Splints, but he failed to take charge of that infield as had Splints.

The dour Andy Christy must have seen that, too, for the next day, when the Ravens jumped into a four-run lead, he replaced Rosgrass with Splints in the sixth. The support behind the pitcher immediately tightened. The Ravens swept the series and swung homeward. And now that he was back in the lineup, Splints forgot himself again.

He had Delroy straightened out for a spell at least. Of course, when no evidence of a scout or a scout's approval was obvious, Delroy might slump back. But he was playing heads-up ball, giving with the big try, now, anyway. But there was still the problem of Rafe Lenning. The ex-Mogul moundsman was glum and tauter than ever on the train.

It was when they arrived in the home city the next morning, an open date before the Bison series, that the idea came to him. He'd recalled that letter from his separated wife that Lenning had left on the bar one night. Remembered her maiden name, Paula Reblee. And the name of that Indiana small town, Sastecko. Acting on a hunch, though it was barely after seven A.M. he hurried to a phone in the depot and put through a long distance call. Lenning's wife herself, Paula, very sleepy-voiced answered. Splints began to talk fast after introducing himself as a teammate of Rafe's. He was thinking of the kind words he'd seen in that letter, the fact she wasn't going to marry the other man. Basing his gamble

on the angle that she had discovered she still cared.

"Rafe's behaving himself and fighting hard to come back, Mrs. Lenning," he told her. "But his pride has been hurt—bad. He's pitching a big one tomorrow—one that can make or break him, maybe. If somebody—you, I mean—could just give him that spark of encouragement... If you'd just send him a telegram saying you're behind him, that you're backing him, it might turn the trick. And it wouldn't hurt you any."

There was such a long pause he thought he'd failed. Then Paula Lenning said in a small thoughtful voice, "I'll see," and hung up.

IT WAS A sultry day that dragged with no game scheduled. Around the hotel there were more rumors about the purchase of the club by this Turner the cosmetic manufacturer. They said he was in town to close the deal, that he was a millionaire who planned to build a baseball empire, the first step of which was the acquisition of the Ravens. That night, browsing through an evening paper in the lobby, there was a wired story from the Bison city. It said that Bucky Ackers, Bison crack short-stop, was completely recovered from his knee injury and would play in the Raven series. "I've got a little score to settle," the hard-boiled Ackers was quoted as stating. "When I get on those basepaths, there's a certain second sacker who'd better keep out of my path—or he'll wake up in the accident ward of the local hospital."

Splints felt his jaw cords tighten. He knew Ackers meant him, and Ackers had a reputation around the circuit for "getting" any man he bore a grudge against. Then Splints rationalized and smiled a little. After all, baseball was a game, albeit a tough one. And taking a man out of a play was part of it. Ackers doubtlessly understood that, too.

He saw the telegram delivered to Rafe Lenning in the hotel coffee shop the next morning. The big pitcher, a little gaunt, had just been picking at his food. He opened it and then began to beam. He must have read it three

or four times. Then he put it down next to his plate, as if he couldn't take his eyes off it, and tore into his food like a starved man. On the way out he paused by Splints' table, a fresh light in his eyes. The latter didn't need to be told.

"Just got a wire from Paula, kid. She wishes me luck and says she'll say a little prayer I win." He clapped Splints on the back. "That could mean something, couldn't it, eh? Gee, she must've been checking on one of the local papers here real close to know I'd work today. Gee-ee!"

Splints was hopeful when he rode out to the ball park. In the clubhouse, Andy Christy told him he'd start at the keystone today. Then the pre-game warmup infield drill was over almost before he knew it, and batting practise. He felt a little jittery back on the dugout bench; this could be the key game—the game that decided whether the Ravens would be just a foundering ball club again. Or a team with some drive, finding itself in the first division, and determined to go someplace. *Bevens, wake up, he told himself. You aren't the pilot of this club. But you act like it. All you got to do is hold down second fairly well—for your own good.*

But actually he didn't believe in his own mental admonitions as the bell rang and they trotted onto the field. "Yah—let's get going and claw the pants off 'em!" It was the customarily hard-boiled Mac Delroy who let out that war cry as they moved out.

LENNING threw with a zing he hadn't shown since his wife walked out on him. He stopped the first two men and still seemed supremely confident when a fluke handle-hit dropped in behind third. He whiffed the cleanup man for the third out, blazing his curve in there. Back in the dugout, Splints saw him draw a folded sheet of yellow paper from the pocket of his windbreaker a moment. It was the telegram from his wife.

Hitting second, with one down, Splints himself stepped to the plate

in the home half against Bozo Silbers' sinker stuff.

"Let the bum get on, Bozo!" yapped Ackers from shortstop. "Put him on! I wanta give him a personal interview down here!" But it was Ackers himself who, when Splints timed a change-up pitch and pushed it into the hole between short and third, who came up with a brilliant stop to rob Splints.

The second frame opened with big Rafe Lenning getting the first man to face him. Then Vinson on first let a roller trickle between his legs into right field. Lenning, working with the loosest motion since he'd come down to the minors, worked it to a 3-2 count on the next Bison. He whipped a big curve in there, catching the outside corner.

"Ball four!" bawled the chief umpire.

It was a rough call. Lenning looked as if he'd been knifed in the back. Monty Horn slammed off his mask and began to holler. Splints ran in to join the rhubarb, and he was amazed when he found the rest of the infield in there with him. The one-time listless Ravens seldom bothered protesting a decision. Of course, it stood. And the hitter got his base, putting two on with one down. Rafe Lenning began to come apart at the seams, pitching high, then into the dirt. Splints ran halfway to the mound.

"Remember that telegram, Rafe," he called.

Rafe threw and put a curve over on the hands. Then the Bison got a piece of the ball. It was a low twisting blooper, over first, up the foul-line. Splints was on his bicycle, cutting over as he back-pedalled furiously, the skinny long arms and legs flying. But the puffy breeze blowing spasmodically from left field to right, caught the ball, carried it foul. Further foul. It was obvious the new Raven second sacker couldn't reach it. But he kept going at top speed.

"Look out for the stands!" somebody yelled.

The ball was dropping fast now. Splints was some feet away. Then

he took off in a sideward dive, speared it with outflung glove. And crashed head-on into the wall, bounced back off it prone on the grass. But baseball instinct brought him to his knees and he sidearmed to Vinson to hold the runners on after the catch. When he tried to stand, he pitched over flat.

TIME WAS called and players rushed to him. He wasn't cut, though a lump was rising on the side of his head. But he was badly stunned as the club trainer worked over him with a cold wet sponge and the smelling salts. He wobbled when he got to his feet.

"I'll put Rosgrass in," Andy Christy said. "Here, let me help you into the dugout, Bevers. I'll—"

But Splints waved him away, took a few jogging steps, snapped his head right and left, then said he could play. The tall Rafe walked to position with him, muttering, "That was great, kid, that was great." It was the big second out with a play now possible at any base but home. And Lenning, firing with a fierce determination, got the next hitter to roll out to Chink Brown at short.

In the third and fourth innings, the hard-driving Bisons never got the ball out of the infield. And they were steamed up a-plenty inasmuch as they had just taken over first place by half a game. The Ravens were reaching Bozo Sillers occasionally but never really threatening. Then Splints came up in the home half of the fifth. One down. A sinker pitch, half speed, inside, after a blazing strike. With a shortened bat, the clever Splints swung under it and lifted a safe hit into short left.

"Come on down here, ya bum!" Ackers called to Splints on first with the left-handed hitting Mac Delroy at the platter.

A called ball. A foul into the right field stands. Another ball. And then the hit-and-run sign was flashed. But the best Delroy could do was a high fly into right and Splints had to scamper back. The cleanup hitter jumped on the first offering and smashed it back through the box. But Ackers had been playing over and

deep. He scooped the ball back of second. Could have beaten Splints easily to the bag for the forceout and third out. Instead the Bison short-stop cut over to the basepath, to the right of second, and slammed the ball into the speeding Splints' ribs.

Splints was knocked, half spinning out of the basepath. Stumbled. For a few seconds, it felt as if his ribs must be broken, driven into his lungs. Ackers sneered at him. "Did it tickle, sweetheart? Yah! That's only a taste of what's coming next time!"

In the dugout, Delroy looked at the still gasping kid and remarked, "That guy likes to play rough, don't he?"

THE SIXTH. A boot followed by a pebble hop put Lenning in the hole right off. Monty Horn let a pitch get through him and the runners advanced a base. Splints waved the infield in, figuring on a squeeze bunt. One run would be mountain-big in that kind of a ball game. And then the hitter, falling away from an inside pitch, failed to get the bat off his shoulder. The ball hit it. A four-leaf-clover lucky low pop over short into short left. Two tallies scampered across and the hitter made first.

It was a body blow. But Splints kept talking to the hill, low and quietly in a steady stream. That time Lenning didn't go wild. He whiffed the man. The next Bison punched a hot one between first and second. It looked like a hit. But Splints flung himself over, lunged, gloved it. And then twisting to a sitting position, he armed it to Brown covering the key-stone. Brown to Vinson at first for the D.P. The crowd ranted. It was a brilliant play that Splints had initiated.

The Ravens got two men on but couldn't work them around in their half. Then the seventh. And the first hitter lined one at the box that nailed Rafe Lenning like a bullet in the chest. Knocked him down. He did scramble over and get the ball and make the play to first, but his face twisted in agony for several moments after he rose. Time was called as they began to throw frantically out in

the Ravens bullpen. Rafe was allowed a few tosses to see if he could continue. He pegged them, then pluckily swore he could continue. But he walked the tough Ackers. Threw two wide balls to the next man, his face bleeding sweat with the effort of hurling. Christy called time again and came to the hill.

Then the pregnant stillness was broken by a woman's cry. "Rafe! Rafe dear!" Splints' head jerked to the left. It was her, the trim brunette Paula, Lenning's wife, standing on her seat several rows up behind the first-base boxes. She hadn't just sent the telegram as Splints had begged her to do. She'd flown in for the game. Rafe was staring at her as if she were a ghost.

"Rafe!" she called. "You stick in there, honey! Stick in there! I'm with you—all the way, all the way!"

Rafe Lenning seemed to suddenly grow two inches taller on that hill. Standing beside him and Christy, Splints saw his eyes fire up. "Get back in the dugout, skipper," the hurler told Christy gruffly. "I got 'em now. Hell, I got *everything* now!"

HE WENT to work and whiffed that hitter for the big second out. Then he made the next Bison punch a slow hopper to short. Brown gobbled it and pegged to Splints at second for the forceout with Ackers coming down from first. But the bullet-like throw was low, in the dirt. Splints dropped to a knee to be sure to block it. Gloved the ball out of the dirt for the forceout, the final out of the frame, having Ackers by a good ten feet.

But the belligerent Bison short-stop took off in a high head-first dive. His body crashed down atop the crouched Splints. For a few moments, Splints thought somebody had loosed a small atomic bomb on the ball park. Then the rockets stopped shooting around in his head and he rose to go to the dugout. His mouth jerked and he limped a little despite himself. That operation-weakened heel had been injured. Rafe grabbed his arm walking in.

Then Delroy came steaming into

the dugout. "All right, all right—so they want to play dirty, huh? Let's murder the bums! Let's put the wood to Bozo and knock 'em outa this damn ball game!" He was raging.

And Lenning, leading off that inning, banged the dugout step with his lumber. "I'm getting on—somehow! Then you guys get your hitting clothes on. See? They can't kick Splints around!" And he did get a hit, a scratch single off Bozo Siller's glove.

Sillers whiffed the Raven leadoff. Then Splints stepped up there. And, cagily as always even when scrapping mad, he saw Sillers' control wobble and waited him out for a walk. Delroy went to the plate. He was too eager in his heat. He golfed a low pitch, a slicing drive, into short center, a single. But the Mercury-footed Bison center fielder was in on it fast, took it on the first hop as Splints, bogged down by that heel, drove for second. Running, he flashed a look toward Lenning over at third. The big hurler, none too fast, was just making the turn. Then he stumbled and fell flat. And Splints saw the outfielder's throw coming in to Bucky Ackers who awaited it in the baseline about ten feet past second.

Splints sobbed to himself. If Lenning hadn't fallen—it would have been one run, anyway. He cut his eyes over to third again. And Lenning, up, had taken off for the plate anew. Splints knew at once that Ackers' relay home would get him easily. Splints Bevers never hesitated. That potential run had to be protected somehow. Driving himself despite the heel, he rounded second. Ackers was blocking the basepath, glove outstretched. And the rules said the runner had a right to the basepath. Splints never cut speed as he went past Ackers' back. And as he did, he brushed him just enough to knock him off balance and onto one leg. Then Splints said a little prayer for his own safety as he threw himself on toward third.

It worked. Ackers dropped the throw-in momentarily. It was enough. Lenning crossed. And Splints himself skidded safely into the hot corner

with a hook slide. Then Vinson took 2 and 2, batting cleanup, and rifled a fat double off the right field wall. Splints walked home with the tying run. And Mac Delroy choo-chooed in, red face smeared with a great grin, with the tally to put the Ravens in front, 3-2.

That was the ball game. Lenning was untouchable in the last two frames, looking over with a foolish smile to where Paula sat every time he retired a man. The last Bison assaulted thin air for a third strike in the top of the ninth. And the Ravens, a new rejuvenated Raven club, romped off the field yelling like Cherokees on the warpath. Splints felt good despite that sore heel....



SPLINTS watched Paula fight her way down to the railing of a box. Saw her arms twine around Rafe Lenning's sweaty red neck as he grabbed her fiercely, ignoring fans who milled around him. That was one thing he'd helped fix up, anyway. It made him feel lonely though, Splints. Nobody could ever fix up what had half-throttled his diamond career.

He started off when Ackers came running from the other side of the field. He waved a fist but he was grinning as he called, "Ya little bum, you're quite a hunka ball player! You're all right, Bevers!"

That made him feel a little better. Then, in the clubhouse, he got depressed again. For there was a message for Mac Delroy to long distance a certain number in Chicago. And when the burly left fielder emerged from the phone booth, he was whooping crazily with joy. The number he'd called had been that of an old friend, a sports writer. The news hadn't been released officially yet.

"But I know this guy's tip is solid," he told Splints and Rafe. "The president of the National League assigned a firm of private detectives to investigate that gambling smear on me; I've been cleared. The smear will be off when I sign a statement swearing

never to play the ponies again. Yowie!" He took a belt at a locker front, making it boom like a drum. "All I gotta do is keep playing like I been going the last week and I'll have some major league club bidding for me! Wha-hoo!"

They could hardly hold Mac still long enough to pump his hand. And Splints was honestly glad for him. But it only exaggerated his own predicament, the broken-down heel, to which there was no answer....

Staring at a detective story magazine, he sat in a quiet alcove of the hotel lobby that night, trying not to think. Rafe Lenning would doubtlessly be called back by the Moguls. And Delroy, with three for four that afternoon at the plate, and fielding with sharpness and eagerness for the past week, would certainly be picked up again by some major league club. But he himself.... "Don't be sorry for yourself, you big baby," he muttered as a bellhop stepped before him.

"Mr. Bevers.... say, a Mr. Hubert Turner would like to see you in his suite. Number 925. He said right away, if you could make it."

Splints frowned. "Turner?" He knew nobody by that name. Then he remembered those club sale rumors. This Turner was the guy supposed to be interested in the purchase.

PUZZLED, A little listless himself for once, he went up to 925. It was an expensive four-room suite with a living room done in dazzling moderne decor, a portable bar at one side. A huge man in a quiet gray flannel sports jacket, iron-gray haired himself, swung over to him, hand outstretched. Hubert Turner, the cosmetic millionaire, looked as if he might have been a Yale tackle once. He had striking black eyes that drilled through a man yet had a warm twinkle in them. He stunned Splints by knowing him.

"Hello there, Bevers. I'm Turner, Hube Turner. You've probably heard the rumors of the sale of the Ravens. Deal was closed tonight. Just phoned the press statement to the city desks a few minutes ago." His hand-clasp

was firm as he looked down on the slim Splints.

Splints was more puzzled than ever. He looked around at the others in the room, a couple of private secretaries, Turner's paunchy attorney, Johnston the city's top sports writer. And over on a divan, with a big highball glass in his hand, Andy Christy. And Christy looked positively happy.

"Bever," Turner went on, "I'm crazy about baseball. I'm ready to spend money, to get some real players for the Ravens. This deal is just the first move in a minor-league baseball empire I propose to build. It's going to be my hobby. To hell with financial returns. And after I get that set," he said in a big voice that boomed with enthusiasm, maybe I'll move into the majors. And any man who sticks with me and has the goods, goes along up with me—all the way."

"Well—uh—that's fine," said Splints, feeling like a fifth wheel. He didn't get the drift of things.

A phone rang. A secretary answered, told Turner it was a long distance from Cleveland, from his local sales manager there.

"I'm busy. Tell him to call back in half an hour." He turned back to Splints. "Bever, Mr. Christy is resigning as manager. He's got a nice opportunity to get into business. And we're giving him his release. Now—I want your advice on a new pilot."

Splints just gagged at first. "Well—uh—shucks, I'm just a kid, a big league rook who was sent down here and—"

TURNER chortled as if it were a great joke. Then his piercing eyes grew sober. "Bever, I'll tell you something. I've had experts assay every player on this club—on the field. I know the hopeful stuff—and the deadwood. More than that, I had a private detective agency get me the low-down on every player's life off the field. I'm a business man. I don't buy blind. I've known how every player had conducted himself off the field for some weeks—who are the conscientious team players—and who aren't. See?"

Splints just nodded. Turner went on:

"And I know almost exactly what you did to straighten out a certain two players. We won't mention names. But one's a pitcher and the other's on the picket line.... From Paula Lenning, I even learned who was instrumental in getting her here today!"

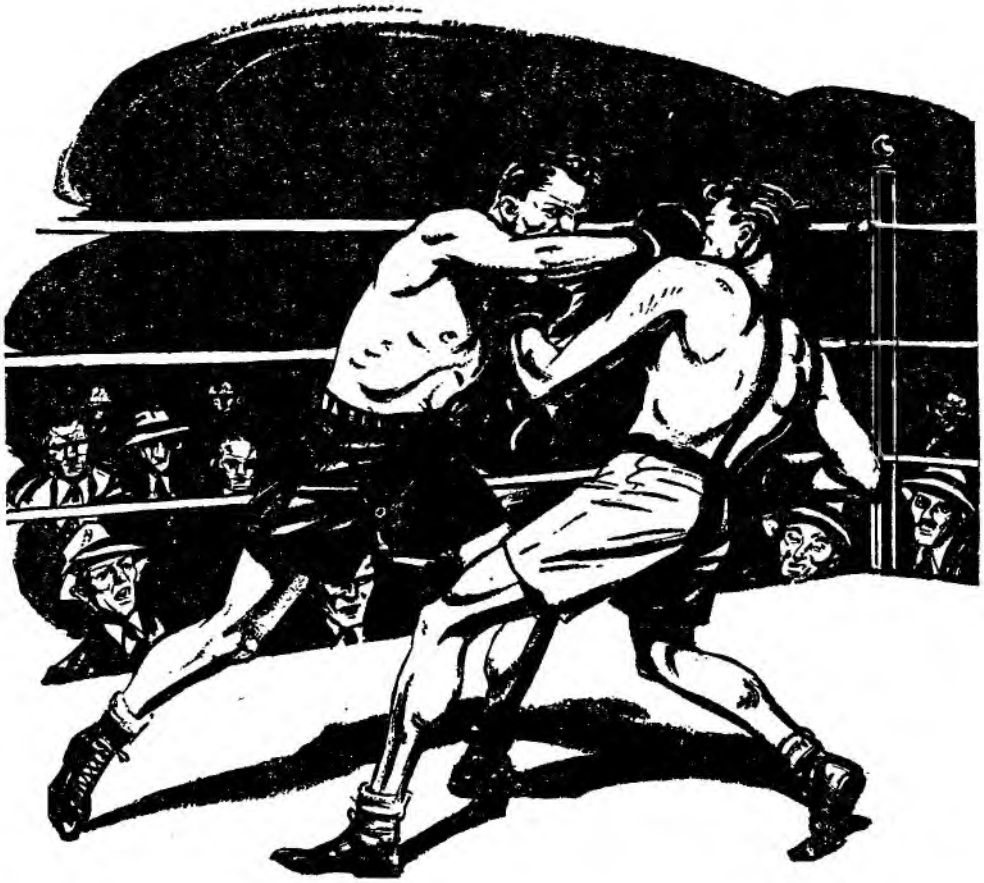
Splints reddened. "Well, I—I just thought—"

"That's it, Bever. I like a man who thinks. I like a man who works for the interest of the club. I like a man who can handle other men—and you can. And I like youth in any organization I control...."

"Now—I want your advice about a new pilot for the Ravens? Do you think you could handle the job, Bever?"

Splints Bever was still in a daze when Turner handed him a tall glass, saying one drink wouldn't hurt him on this occasion....





HARD GUY

by JOE BRENNAN

Something about the raw deal that this kid was getting made Dan Flaherty forget that he was supposed to be a hard guy . . .

DAN FLAHERTY looked up from his typewriter in the pressbox and watched young Babe Whisler reel back across the ring like a drunkard in the wind. Blackjack Jones, with a ten pound pull in the weights, churned in, making a chopping block out of the lighter man.

"A raw deal, Dan," rasped time-keeper Larson at his right, "—this thing of matching a welter with a lightweight."

The skinny fight judge to Dan's left butted in with, "The Commission shouldn't let promoters get away with it! It's these mismatches that put so many punchers on Silly Street."

A sudden meaty *splat!* and Babe Whisler's blond head wrenched back from a blast to his face. His burgundy-stained mouthpiece went skittering across the canvas. The kid punched back desperately, but Blackjack's greater poundage, heavier guns, were too much. Babe was get-

ting rope burns on the back of his legs, his arms. The crowd-noise swelled, vibrated.

Dan glanced at the round indicator, saw it was the fourth and last. For an instant the bleakness in Babe's brown eyes got Dan, then he shook it off with, "Ah, these kid fighters have to learn to take it! It's a rugged trade."

Still, it somehow, didn't ring quite true to his ears; not quite...

The junglelike roar of the fans smothered his words. Dan tried to think of other reasons that would justify the mismatch. *These catchweight bouts are strictly legit*, he tried to tell himself. And he wondered why this softness, this mushiness, had a habit of sneaking up on him. He knew he had to be tough in this business of covering the fight game for the *Call*. What, with a guy like Boss Hackett as sports editor! *Hackett...* he thought. *Hackett who always milks the racket*. And he smiled bitterly at the alliteration of the thing.

With that, he blurted reassuringly to the judge at his side, "Can't afford to let sentiment enter it, you know..."

A blistering punch to Babe's jaw, and the youngster corkscrewed to the canvas, his legs tangling under him. Pain twisted his face as he struggled to get up before the referee could start a count. In that instant the bell clapped tinnily. It was all over; end of the line. The referee was picking up the judges' tallies.

"Just a formality," cracked Dan, watching the arbiter examine the slips of paper. "The Babe lost from here to Timbaktu." He saw the handlers assist Babe to his corner; apparently the kid's knee had been wrenched in the spill. The sight of the fighter's battered face got him to thinking of what more such poundings could do to the kid's brain... And his memory went back to what his mother had said in that not too distant past—those days before her death when he, himself, had been boxing professionally.

"Don't be hard, Danny, boy," Mom had said. "Don't let your trade toughen your heart. It's a bitter trade, but you won't always be a pugilist..."

Well, that was all back of him now; he'd pulled out of the daffy fighting end of it. Reporting the bouts was an easier racket; easier on the metabolism, that is. Still, you had to be a hard guy, even for this.

"Sure no place for a morning glory!" he breathed to himself. With that he went on tapping on his typewriter that Blackjack Jones had won again.

"Too bad!" moaned timekeeper Larson. "This little Babe Whisler could develop into a great attraction if they'd fight him *only* in his own weight division."

"A great prospect bein' burned out overnight," agreed the fight judge.

Dan went on hammering out his news report, wishing he could find some spark of human interest in the story.

THE LIMPING Babe Whisler was helped out of the ring, almost carried up the aisle. A quick, stolen glance at the stricken kid, and Dan continued with his inner argument about remaining objective in this parlous, brutal business. *Look at the promoters*, he thought. *The managers, the bettors...* But he was having trouble in justifying a complete lack of sentiment.

The card of bouts ran on, leather splatting on sweaty bodies, rosined shoes chuffing and squeaking on canvas, the fight-batty crowd growling, shrieking, stamping—all in accordance with, and in proportion to, what went on in that squared arena.

At the conclusion of the dull final match, Dan started for the dressing room. "Got to get a yarn out of one of these main-eventers," he said to Larson.

After a brief interview with both principals, Dan stood looking at his notes, ruefully wagging his head. "Nothing exciting here," he muttered.

"Never is!" puffed fat Ike Oblenman, who had just stepped to Dan's side. "The fight game's in the dumps, Dan."

Dan squeezed the photographer's mushy arm. "Yeah, Ike, good stories are a mile apart.

Ike set his camera down. "A photog

can't even get a good shot these days." His round face suddenly lighted up and his close-set eyes danced. "On the other hand, I sure fetched me 2 pip of a cheesecake pitcher couple minutes ago."

"Ugh!" gripped Dan. "I got you this job to shoot pics for our sports department..."

"Look," came back Ike, "it ain't often I get me a cheesecake pitcher like this one. Legs like you never see!"

Dan started moving away. "I'm trying to build up a live sports sheet—and you're out shooting legs." He wagged his head in disgust. "Ike, you're some help!"

"Well, this was sort've a fighter pitcher," defended Ike weakly. "At least, it was a fighter an' his sister." His words trailed off as more and more guilt crept into his red face.

Dan halted for an instant, turned. "Fighter?" he parroted. "What fighter?"

"That Babe Whisler... He's so punched up that his sister had to help him into their car outside." Ike grinned wide from one prehensile ear to the other. "Anyhow I think the dame's his sister; she was pourin' him into the roadster when I shot the two of 'em."

It was enough of a word picture for Dan. He stood there, listening to his own breathing. Mom's whispered words were tangled with thoughts of cuts, bruises... maybe broken bones and addled brains. "All for a twenty-buck purse!" Dan grated bitterly.

Ike's round face screwed up into one big lump of wrinkles "What you talkin' about, pal? You goin' mushy in this loony racket?"

"Wheres Babe Whisler now?" Dan asked.

"Search me. Their wagon was back of the Stadium a few minutes ago. Now Dan, to get back t this gal: you never in your life—"

But Dan had slammed the door and disappeared.

HIS FEET crunching on the gravelly auto park at the rear of the Stadium, Dan Flaherty looked into the gloom of the few roadsters parked there. The last one—a rickety

antiquity of unknown vintage—had low voices coming from it. Dan stepped to its running board.

"Babe Whisler?" he said, squinting into the semi-darkness.

"That's right," came a masculine reply.

Dan blinked for clearer vision, saw the blonde girl gently touching iodine to a split over the fighter's eye.

"I'm Dan Flaherty of the *Call*," he said. "I'd like to get a story from you."

The girl halted in her ministrations. "My brother has already been exploited till there's little left of him..."

Dan's faculties were being punched around by the girl's wealth of taffy hair, the wide shining eyes, the straight, white teeth, the intimate, throaty voice.

"Hold on," Dan argued. "A good human interest story in my sheet would get him more bouts." With an effort he swung his gaze to Babe's swollen eyes, split lips. *Looks like he went through a windshield*, he reflected.

Babe spoke again. "Mister, Cissie's right. The fight game in your city takes away more than it gives."

"Mr. Flaherty," Cissie added, "we never lost a bout till we came here. We haven't had an evenly-matched bout."

Dan felt the whiplash. After all, this was his own hometown they were criticizing! He wanted to lash back in defense of his birthplace. But a glance at the lost look in the eyes of Babe Whisler—the hopelessness, the aloneness there! He saw something of the same beaten look in Cissie's face, too. Mom's words were tapping at Dan's brain again; tapping and reminding. "Don't be hard, Danny..."

"Look," Dan said, "I'm going over to the Press Club Grill for a snack. Will you join me?"

Young Babe leaned closer to Dan, scanned his face as though searching for larceny that was bound to be there. "I've been written up before, Mister."

Dan knew he was fighting a losing fight. "Listen, I want to be your friend. You've been slipped a raw deal

here; *you* and a slew of others. It's time somebody did something about cleaning up the fight game in this man's town. It can be as fine as any other sport."

The brother and sister exchanged puzzled looks. Their eyes returned to Dan, and there was something of the hunted animal in them; the trapped, frightened animal.

Babe pushed a hand through his curly hair, said, "Well, what can we do?"

"Just come with me," Dan said. "Both of you. Let me look at you, talk with you—to keep alive this fire I have right now..." And through his mind was running a chain of pictures—larceny-hearted managers bleeding their fighters, matchmakers making mismatches to afford quick knock-outs, promoters paying boxers off as if they were peasants, ex-fighters shuffling and stumbling along sidewalks in quest of a handout.

Babe studied Dan closer, turned and nodded to his sister, "I'm for it, Cissie."

She pursed her full lips, looked thoughtful and sad.

"Please..." Dan prompted. And the sight of these two was in his brain, in the pit of his stomach. "Please?"

"Yes," came Cissie's soft, husky voice. "We—we'll have one more try."

"One more try?" repeated Dan.

"Just one," Cissie answered bitterly, "at trusting a newsman. Even the last one was only interested in snapping a picture of me helping Babe into our car."

"We'd better get some medical attention for that knee, Babe," Dan suggested.

"It—it'll be all right, Mr. Flaherty. I'll favor it for awhile. Just a sprain."

WITH CISSIE at the wheel, they drove to the Press Club Grill. Dan felt a little absurd at having this young couple in tow, but he had a job to do. One that had needed doing for too long. As soon as he had them seated at a table, he installed himself in a telephone booth and called Ike Obleman at the office.

"Ike," he growled, "you've already shot one picture of Babe Whisler and

his sister—that I know. But now I want you to come down here to the Grill and shoot another. This time, the kind I want!"

"Why," sputtered Ike. "Boss Hackett won't let you run no pic of them two in the sheet!"

"Listen to me," Dan said. "These two need help. They've been taking a pasting for too long. By helping them, we help a pack of others. We shoot a warm, honest picture of these poor kids, Ike. People read it and feel it—and you know what John Q. Public does when he gets souped up!"

"Y-y-you mean to clean up the fight racket?"

"Yeah, and you're helping me."

"Dan, you got a hole in your head! You should squirt oil in it to make it work—"

"Squirt, hell!" Dan stopped him. "Ike, I got you your job—and you know I can cut off your water whenever I feel like it. That loan you want from me. You will whistle for it. That promise I made to you about the cigarette girl. Now, it's *no*. I'm telling you, you'd better hike down here with your traps!"

"I—I'm almost there, Dan, pal."

"Now, you're cooking with atomic power," Dan said.

"S-s-say, Dan," Ike said weakly. "That loan an' my job—you ain't choppin' me off?"

"Don't be squirrely," Dan said.

"Even if Boss Hackett don't run the story?"

"It either runs," came back Dan, "or I take a walk. Now, get down here. Ike, as fast as your pants'll take you!"

Dan went back to the table, found Babe and Cissie talking in low tones. They ceased the moment he stepped up—and he saw the distrust that still smoldered back of their eyes.

Dan got them to order; made them order steaks, even though they insisted they weren't hungry. He'd seen that same look on faces before; young faces and old faces. And when the food came it proved that Dan was right.

Babe and Cissie ate slowly—for they were really gentle people at heart—but they also ate with that certain intentness and gratefulness

shining from their eyes. Dan had seen this same thing in the Lowlands of Western Europe right after the big push. And it hadn't been pretty. Between swallows they'd look up at him, thanks glimmering through the unbelief on their faces.

Meanwhile, Dan talked to them of their troubles. They'd had plenty. Babe's story was the heartbreaking one of a kid-fighter in the toils of local boxing moguls. Fighting his lungs out for a fistful of dimes, accepting any opponent in order to get on a card and make a dollar, trying other clubs in an effort to get a better break. And always finally receipting for a cruel punching at the hands of a bigger man, a better man. You couldn't win.

When the brother and sister had stopped eating, Dan saw that food wasn't in itself enough that getting the hunger from their stomachs wasn't the whole answer. And he realized he had to try for them. Come hell or high water, he had to try. Somehow, he felt that Mom had a hand in all this.

WHAT IKE OBLEMAN puffed in at the side entrance. Standing there and mopping his bald pate, he caught Dan's eye and motioned him over. Dan excused himself at the table and joined the photographer.

"We're wastin' our time" Ike panted. "Boss Hackett stopped me as I piled out of the newsroom—wanted to know where I was haulin' the gear..."

"I hope you told him"

"Yup, I did—an' he's jerry to us. It's no dice. He don't want no part of sentimental writin'. Told me to get some shots of—"

"Go over and sit down with my friends," Dan ordered. "Have a cup of Java with them. I'll be right back."

With that he returned to the telephone booth and got the sports editor on the line. The Boss came into it like a hurricane unleashed.

"Dan, we're not wasting any space on a broken down pug!" Hackett stormed. "You want to get our sheet fouled up with the promoters, the commissioners, the matchmakers?"

Dan reached deep for his courage, blew air out of his lungs. "Boss, this brother and sister go into our sheet; a big picture, a truthful story. People have to know about this mess. The game out here is a cesspool. You've got to do this for me."

"I've wha-a-at?"

This is it, thought Dan *Here goes*. . . And Mom's words were gently prodding, shoving. "Okay," Dan heard himself say in a voice that wasn't quite his own, "I quit. Get yourself a new boy! I've got an offer from the *Tribune!*"

There was a momentary silence at the other end of the line. Dan could distinctly hear heavy breathing.

Dan went on, "The *Tribune* sees it my way. Editor Robbins is ready to let me crusade to clean up the stinking game."

"Hold on!" came Hackett's bellow. "The *Tribune* can't pay you what—"

"I'm not interested in pay right now," broke in Dan. And now he was ready for a new tack. "Listen, Boss, that dough you've been taking from managers for giving their fighters a plug—"

"Wait, Dan. You're unduly excited!"

And Dan knew things were shaping up better now. He could afford to hit harder from here on in.

"You bet I'm excited," Dan cracked. "I'm a kid with a new bike—a shiny red one. It's a two-seater; you riding with me?"

"I—I don't know whether I'm a missionary or a sucker, but—well, I guess I'll be crusadin' with you..."

Dan joined the three at the table again. "You're gassing like long lost friends," he ribbed as he sat down. And he saw that even the unpredictable Ike Obleman was being sold.

IKE WASN'T too bright to talk to, but he knew how to shoot pictures. *That* he knew. He also knew what Dan wanted and he banged out three of them. Pictures of this beautiful young girl and her battered, hungry-looking brother who was be-

ing gobbled up in the maw of the boxing racket.

In the third picture he caught the bewilderment of these two orphans, the frustration, the hopelessness. Printed, it would be a call for proper regulations in the local scheme of things; a scream for intelligent supervision and fair play; a cry for all the changes that would go to making of the game a clean, decent thing. Ike panted and grunted throughout the whole operation; he'd seen the light, and his heart was in his job—for once.

Dan spotted George Blakeman, peer of all fight managers, at a far table. He ambled over and had a long, confidential talk with the man, explained his plans.

"The kid has greatness in him," Dan went on. "A diamond in the rough. All he needs is proper handling."

"I know it," rejoined the greying Blakeman. "I saw him in tonight's mismatch. But what about his present manager?"

"No contract, George. He's yours—if you'll take him."

Blakeman was brought over to talk with Babe and his sister A warm, friendly talk—while Dan used the Grill's office typewriter and sweated out the best piece of writing he'd ever done in ten years of news reporting. He brought it back to the table, read it to the group.

It was a soul-touching piece and Blakeman said at its conclusion, "Dan, your sheet will get a Niagara of letters from the public on this one. Phone calls from people till you'll think you've got a bear by the tail!"

"That's what I want," said Dan. "It'll lead to cleaning up the sport. If this expose doesn't make readers break open their piggy banks for dough to start a fund for disabled boxers, if it doesn't make them force the Commission to regulate boxing, if it—well, then my ten years' experience in hammering out copy have gone down the drain..."

Dan picked up the tab for the meal, paid it, then he and Ike left Blakeman with the young couple.

Back at the office, Ike hurried the development of his pictures. Mean-

while, Dan went over his copy with the rewrite man. Upon reading the text, the latter's eyebrows sky-rocketed, and he whistled long and low.

Dan smiled with, "You know what a newspaper can do, too."

"I should, Dan, after twenty years of it." The rewrite man read on, grinned, "And, brother, am I for this!"

Dan felt warm all over as he watched the old-timer speed up the operation. Mom seemed to be hovering somewhere near.

DAN'S CRUSADE took hold in a way that awed the whole *Call* staff. Mail avalanched in, telephones went berserk. Reluctantly, Boss Hackett confessed to Dan, "Priceless writing, guy. Tops."

For days that ran into weeks, Dan flogged and hammered the local boxing setup till the public clamored for correction and adjustment. The State Boxing Commission had a terrific personnel shakeup, investigations got under way. The repercussions detonated all down the line, with many managers' and promoters' licenses being revoked. House cleaning was thorough.

One month later Dan was leaning on his typewriter in the pressbox. Leaning and thinking of the change that had come over the game—and himself. Himself chiefly. Maybe because he had been seeing lots of Babe and Cissie the past several weeks.

It was the third spot coming on; the spot with young Babe Whisler stepping into the rosin box. Lanky, grey George Blakeman was up there patting Babe on the shoulder, saying reassuring things into his fighter's ear.

Timekeeper Larson jabbed a thumb into Dan's ribs. "Dan, looks like we're due for a crackin' good bout."

"At least, they're evenly matched," Dan retorted.

And a rousing bout they did put on. Round after round, both fighters flashed in and out like whirling dervishes. Fast, hard hitters, feinting for position, striking sharply, their lightninglike feet making the canvas smoke. The crowd ate it up. Babe moved with the grace and finesse of

a Jimmy McLarnin. His opponent, too, was a throwback to old ring masters. Good matchmaking had returned; honest promoting and managing was known once more.

The two boxers put on a scintillating, exciting bout, with Babe Whisler barely nosing out his opponent for the decision. The hysterical crowd fractured its collective hands in applause as the fighters returned up the aisle to the dressing room.

Tight with pride over this change he'd brought to the ring game, Dan bent over his typewriter, tapped out: "Young Babe Whisler is on his way to big things..."

Tap-tap-tap...went the keys. He felt good inside. The corners of his mouth curled up in a smile as a feeling swept him that somehow Mom was back of him, reading the lines over his shoulder. He remembered how—even when he was twenty-one!

—she used to kiss him back of the ear and say, "My Danny's little-boy neck..."

In that instant, dreamlike, he felt warm, moist lips brush his neck. His heart trip-hammered. Then came the throaty words: "Oh, Mr. Flaherty, you've done so much for us. I—I hope you'll pardon my losing my mind this way..."

Dan turned and looked up into the wide-thankful eyes of Cissie. She had never before smiled quite so enchantingly at him, and Dan's heart did a double somersault in his breast.

"Y-y-yeah," he stammered, "if you'll pardon my losing my heart."

The fight judge to his left, and the timekeeper to his right, thought he was drunk the way he was staring up at the beautiful girl. He looked like he was going to laugh and cry, all at the same time.

Sweating it Out

THE internationally-known banker and businessman, the late George E. Lattimer of Buffalo, N. Y., shortly before his death, recalled how the harness horses back in the 1870s and 1880s literally sweat it out.

Founder of *The Horse World* (a harness racing publication), owner of a score of the nation's leading trotters and pacers, and once rated one of the three best amateur drivers in the United States, Latimer, who died at 82 after racing horses for 62 years, from 1880 to 1942, remembered vividly the antiquated trains on which the horses were shipped from track to track—sometimes with harrowing results.

One of his horses was so terrified by the din and jolting of the ancient train that when it arrived in Buffalo from Chicago, Lattimer said: "It was standing in a lake of sweat. It had lost 100 pounds!"

The drivers, too, sweat it out in those "good old daze." With six-foot wheels and the driver perched way up on a seat higher than his horse, the old sulkies were weighty vehicles and the drivers themselves were virtual wind drags, slowing their steeds' speed.

Another oldtimer, J. C. Newton, of Orchard Park, N. Y., a race goer since the 1880s and now New York state harness racing commissioner, says:

"We considered a 2:10 horse almost an impossibility. Races were run in heats and the horse winning three was the victor. That meant we often raced from two in the afternoon until sundown before we determined the winner of a single race! Today bike sulkies, with 26 or 28-inch wheels, have speeded up the time considerably."

John Winters Fleming



Jordan's in position before the ball is thrown.

Moron on The Mound

By Raymond Dreyfack

This Frisco Jordan's a busher to make the greenest rookie look like DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, and Ty Cobb all rolled up in one, by comparison. The guy can't do anything except hit homers. But the sloppy way he lurches around hitting homers puts the hex on everyone else!

IT WAS GOING into the upper half of the eighth inning. A capacity crowd of six thousand fans sardined into the Jaybird Stadium was watching the visiting Falcons wriggle on the round end of a three to nothing score.

Wrinkles MacDuff, the Falcon manager, paced the dugout nervously. Today's play by play tragedy was a close duplication of yesterday's massacre. Frisco Jordan, the Jay-

bird's miracle batter, was virtually paralyzing MacDuff's top-division team into a bunch of rheumatic old women.

Things for Wrinkles looked as black as a raven's tail at midnight. Unless the Falcons could pull this game out of the fire, the series would be tied up at three and three. Then, if they dropped tomorrow's game, it would mean the flag.

It would also mean the harassed

manager's job, and for a man who has put the better half of his fifty years into a ball club, that's not a pretty prospect to look forward to.

Wrinkles stopped pacing and wheeled around to face the men. "You guys should be ashamed of yourselves," he snapped, "letting a second rate clown like Frisco Jordan hornswoggle you out of a flag and the extra cash that goes with it."

"He wouldn't wormsgoggle us outa nothin'," Schmo Dumbrowski, the Falcon right fielder, piped up, "if yuh put me in tuh pitch." He sounded like a small boy whose mother had refused him a penny for candy, and everybody laughed.

"The trouble is," Schmo protested, "nobody don't take me serious."

The manager placed a kindly hand on the ball chaser's shoulder. Schmo's desperate desire to pitch for the Falcons was an old story to Wrinkles. "I told you a hundred times," he explained patiently, "a guy don't become a pitcher overnight. It takes long hours of tough training."

"It takes brains too," Bogrow, the catcher, added. This brought another laugh.

"Maybe I ain't got much uh *them*," Schmo said, "but I betcha I could strike out Frisco Jordan."

"How about Joe Dimaggio?" Hennessy asked, "could you fan Dimaggio too?"

"Leave 'im alone," Wrinkles interrupted. "Ribbing Schmo won't win this ball game."

He peered anxiously out of the dugout. Jake Hormone, the short-stop, was stepping up to the plate. Wrinkles cupped his hands and shouted encouragement.

"Get a hit, Jake boy. You're the guy who can do it."

Jake *had* been doing it too, all season long to the tune of .319. But today he wasn't himself; he was two other guys, both unable to handle the not-too-sensational offerings of the Jaybird moundsman. Wrinkles groaned as Jake's final swing pro-

duced nothing but a heavy breeze.

Joe Skellv, the next man up, did better; but Hennessy hit into double play which retired the side. The Falcons just couldn't seem to click, and indirectly, Frisco Jordan was to blame.

AS HIS boys took the field the manager's pacing became faster. Sure he had wrinkles, a five year collection of them; etched on his brow by a fluke batter, too awkward to field a bowling ball, and a leering, monkey-faced Irishman whose main pleasure in life was to persecute him.

That swaggering, theatrical-looking Frisco Jordan was a phony, Wrinkles had no doubt. What stumped him to distraction was how in helicopters the guy got away with it. The tall, rubbery-legged pinch hitter dangled pitchers from the end of his bat like puppets, destroyed the confidence of the rest of the team, and all season had managed to disrupt the entire league with his circus antics. It wasn't that he hit homers—it was the nerve-wracking way he did it. . . . Frisco had an uncanny knack for belting that horse hide around, but, everyone griped there was something fishy about the way he did it. The guy posed at the plate like a one man Carnival exhibit, not even showing a proper respect for the game.

Because of Jordan, shrewd, conniving Casey O'Neill's Jaybirds had managed to pull enough games out of the fire to cop the flag five years running from the top-flight Falcons. This year they seemed to be headed in the same direction, and if they reached their goal it would mean Wrinkles' job, and the manager, who was too proud to go on relief, was plenty worried.

Spike Malone, one of the Falcons' best pitchers, took the mound. Wrinkles could tell from his walk, and from the set of his lips that Spike was unsure of himself. That's the effect Frisco Jordan had on pitchers, even the good ones.

Wrinkles groaned as Higgins was

given a free trip to first. He clenched his fists as Dugan's long fly advanced him to second; clenched them harder when Higgins was pushed on to third by Torgenson's line drive hit.

Then it came: the expected, the inevitable. With two men on, Frisco Jordan was called up to cinch the ball game. It wasn't good baseball—the guy was a dud on the field—but it was effective confusion tactics. He swaggered over to the lumber bin, his long arms dangling like ropes. The fans gave him a rousing reception.

Frisco acknowledged the applause by bending and bowing like a vaudeville performer. Wrinkles grunted with disgust.

As the pinch hitter ambled up to the plate a kid yelled, "Hey Frisco, wotta you gonna do to that old apple?"

The batter turned and grinned amiably. "Make myself a little applesauce," he ad libbed.

The jaybird crowd ate it up. Wrinkles was eating too: fingernails. This had been going on all season. He stuck a yellow pencil between his teeth to relieve the tension, and proceeded to mangle it like a mutt with a lambchop.

Following Wrinkles' instructions Bogrow stepped out of the catcher's box, a safe distance from Frisco's bat, and Malone tossed in the first pitch. Ball one. A tremendous boo swelled up from the crowd and scraped on Wrinkles' frazzled nerves.

Frisco stood by with a mixture of amusement and boredom on his face. He inspected his fingernails disinterestedly as Malone lobbed in the next pitch. Wrinkles chewed harder on his pencil. If the boo was a baa it would have sounded like a herd of sheep. Ball two. Frisco waved to a blonde in the stands.

The next boo which hooted like a thousand train whistles was too much for the unnerved manager. He said to himself, "the hell with it, the hell with everything"; and signalled for a strike.

Frisco was unprepared for the throw and grinned sheepishly as the umpire called strike one. But when Malone's next pitch burned in low and inside, it seemed to Wrinkles that Frisco was in position for it even before it left the pitcher's hand. He swung his bat in a long, graceless arc, such as a bad golfer might have used to make a long drive.

When the horsehide met the wood Wrinkles bit his pencil in two. As the ball rose his heart sank. The game, the pennant, and most likely his job, were traveling on that rising sphere. It didn't stop rising until it reached the stands.

By the time the inning ended the score was seven-nothing.

GOING BACK to the dugout the miserable manager met the main cause of his misery. Big, bushy-haired Casey O'Neill's florid face was set, as usual, in a cocky grin. Wrinkles, regarding him with contempt, addressed him in the customary manner.

"O'Neill," he said, "you're a disgrace to the baseball profession and the Jaybirds are a disgrace to the league."

Casey's grin widened. "There's some truth in what you say."

"Your ball club consists of one man, and he's not even a ball player."

Casey nodded. "You're a perceivin' man, MacDuff."

"The butter-fingered baboon can't throw a ball straight."

"That he can't," Casey agreed.

"He looks more like a ham actor than a baseball player."

"I got the same impression myself. Except for his knack of slamming out homers the guy's a complete flop."

"It ain't natural," Wrinkles raved. "No guy who stands up to a plate the way Frisco Jordan does could keep getting base hits game after game, week after week—"

"Can't figure it myself," Casey said, his eyes twinkling.

Wrinkles scowled at his smug tormentor. "It's no use talkin' to you,

O'Neill. You're not satisfied just getting my goat; you gotta kick it all over the ball park."

He stomped off to the dugout, more miserable than ever.

In the first half of the ninth it was three up and three down for the Falcons, and the game ended with the two clubs tied up at three and three. Tomorrow's contest would be for the flag.

In the locker room Wrinkles nervously ran fingers through what would have been his hair if he hadn't lost it keeping track of Frisco Jordan's batting average. The men showered and dressed in silence.

"The guy ain't human." Wrinkles complained, almost in tears. "He uses some kind of magic."

"Frisco wouldnuh got a hit if I wuz in duh pitcher's box," Schmo blurted. "I woulduh struck 'im out."

The men were too miserable to laugh.

As the team left the locker room Wrinkles motioned for Schmo to stay behind.

MAYBE IT was out of sheer desperation, or maybe because the mentally-retarded right fielder, in spite of his shortage of the gray stuff, was a good guy at heart, and overwhelmingly loyal to the club. At any rate Wrinkles decided to give him a tryout.

"Schmo," he said, when the door closed behind the last player, "how'd you like a chance to show me what kind of a pitcher you'd make?"

Schmo was so happy he could hardly speak.

Wrinkles tossed him a glove, took a catcher's mitt for himself, and pocketed a baseball. "Okay, boy, let's go."

He led the way to a lot in back of the playing field. Wrinkles wanted this performance to be strictly private, just in case Schmo's pitching ability proved to be on the same level as his IQ rating. He had taken enough razzing from the fans and the press during the past five years to

last him the rest of his life.

Wrinkles stationed Schmo a mound's distance from a flat rock, and tossed him the horsehide.

"Okay," he called, rapping his knuckles on the rock, "here's your plate, let's see what you've got."

Schmo, his face as determined as a big leaguer's in a world series game, wound up slowly, and threw in the first pitch. The apple sped toward the plate and smacked into Wrinkles' mitt for a perfect strike.

Schmo repeated the performance several times. He had plenty of speed, and a good eye, but that was all. He had nothing on the horsehide, absolutely nothing. Any fair batter could have lifted his offerings into the bleachers.

As they walked back to the locker room Wrinkles said gently, "Thanks for trying, Schmo. You have a nice peg, but I think you'd better stick to the outfield for the time being. That's where you're needed most."

Schmo's eyes looked like those of a dog, who had just been beaten by his master, but remained loyal just the same. "Tanks anyways," he said, "for givin' me a chanct."

"Forget it," Wrinkles said.

But the manager himself needed a course in forgetting things. That night, instead of sleeping, he spent his hours trying to concentrate on Frisco Jordan, who was demoralizing his men into fourth-rate players.

Tomorrow, less than fourteen hours off, was the big game. Wrinkles knew that he'd have to figure something, or give up figuring for good. His job and livelihood were at stake.

Once, when he dozed off for a few seconds, he had a horrible nightmare about a towering beanpole of a guy, standing at a plate, grinning like a Cheshire cat, and belting baseballs over a high fence. After each clout a bushy headed, monkey-faced Irishman with an exasperating leer on his pan would break into a fit of rollicking laughter. Wrinkles awoke in a sweat.

He turned on the night lamp, lit a cigarette and tried to focus Frisco

Jordan upon the screen of his mind. "How does the guy do it?" he kept asking himself. "How in hell does he do it?"

Wrinkles had never concentrated so hard in his life. He relived Frisco's every action, recalled the way the guy stepped into a pitch as if his bat were a magnet, and the horsehide a steel coil.

He filled two ashtrays with cigarette butts, cracked his knuckles until they ached, knit his brow till even his wrinkles had wrinkles. Then at four a.m. he had an inspiration.

He pulled on pants and shoes, threw a top coat over his pajama jacket, and went downstairs to the telegraph office. He scrawled a few lines on a yellow blank, addressed it to Bill Nolan, a detective pal in San Francisco, and gave it to the clerk.

Then he went back upstairs and flopped down on the bed. This time he slept.

THE NEXT day broke clear and cool, and made to order for the game of baseball. Wrinkles glued himself to the phone; he'd feel much better when he got that call from San Francisco.

But as the minutes faded so did his equilibrium. Eleven o'clock, twelve, one. . . . He became hot under the collar, began worrying about the job again, about who would support the family.

He became panicky. Maybe the whole hunch was screwy, maybe Bill Nolan was out of town, maybe a hundred things. . . .

Two-thirty inched closer. According to schedule the vital game was to be played at the Falcon's stadium. Wrinkles, leaving instructions to switch all calls to the field, went downstairs and hopped a cab.

The ball park was packed, and Wrinkles knew that the smart money was on the Jaybirds. Frisco Jordan, who was bowing to his audience, grinning at the girls, and calmly slapping long drives all over the field, was the center of attraction.

Wrinkles knew that Casey O'Neill

was featuring Frisco for the demoralizing effect it would have on the Falcons. He trudged to the dugout.

Finally, about thirty minutes before game time the phone rang. Wrinkles grabbed the receiver. "Hello, hello!" "Long distance, San Francisco." His shoulders sagged with relief.

The men, sensing something in the air, gathered around. It was a one-sided conversation.

Wrinkles merely kept saying, "Yeah, yeah," but each time he said it his eyes lit up, and his voice became higher pitched.

He wound up with, "Thanks Bill, you're the best pal I ever had. I won't forget what you've done."

When he hung up Hennessy asked, "What's the gimmick?"

"Well, for one thing," the manager said jauntily, "I think that little telephone conversation is gonna cost Casey O'Neil a flag."

"How do you figure that?" Jake Hormone asked.

"Oh, just a little hunch I got," Wrinkles answered mysteriously. "You just go out there and play the best game you know how, and leave the rest to me."

"I don't get it," Bogrow said skeptically, "you plannin' to kidnap Frisco Jordan?"

Wrinkles grinned. "I don't think that'll be necessary. But that's all I'm tellin' you guys. I don't want you to get over-confident and throw the game that way."

AFTER A while the umpire hollered, "Play ball!" and the Falcons took the field. Whizzing the horsehide about the infield they looked better than they had all week. *Maybe I'll hang on to this job, after all*, Wrinkles thought hopefully; he crossed his fingers anyhow.

The manager's show of confidence had relaxed the team's tension; and the fact that Joey Chambers, one of the league's best hurlers was at duty on the mound, also helped.

But it was one of those days. The

Jaybirds had acquired the winning habit and didn't like to be shaken loose from it, and in spite of the fact that the Falcons had chalked up ten hits to the other team's five, the breaks weren't with them. Going into the seventh the score was deadlocked at two apiece, and Wrinkles was sweating baseballs.

In the last half of the inning Buck Holton, the Jaybird pitcher, walked Schultz, and Jake Hormone's double advanced him to third. Skelly sacrificed Schultz home, and Hennessy fanned. With two men out Bogow singled, scoring Jake, and though Bogrow died on first the Falcons were two runs ahead.

Wrinkles let out his breath long enough to yell, "That's the way it's done, men. Now hold em and the game's a cinch."

That's all Wrinkles said, but his lips continued to move, because he was praying.

The Jaybirds, in their half of the eighth, squeezed a run out of Chambers, cutting the Falcons lead to one. At the beginning of the ninth the score was still four-three.

But when the Jaybirds came in to bat Wrinkles was no longer so sure of himself and his job. He resumed his pacing, and his fingers were fidgety, in spite of the fact that they were all crossed.

The game of baseball is at best an unpredictable occupation, and though the manager's strategy was well laid, a one-run lead is a puny margin for a man to base his hopes on.

THE STADIUM was quiet, the fans tense in their seats.

Charlie Evans stepped up to the plate for the Jaybirds. Chambers wound up and burned the first one across the plate for a called strike. The next pitch broke wide and Evans reached out to tip it for a high spinning foul which the first sacker pulled down for the initial out.

But Quincy, the next batter, squeezed out a base on stones, and Peterson's single advanced him to third, while Wrinkles donated another

er twenty years of his life.

Chambers buckled down to fan Grimaldi, and Wrinkles stopped pacing long enough to wipe the sweat pellets from his brow; but when the next man up was walked the frantic manager's steps almost wore out the dugout. The bases were loaded; his whole future hung precariously on the next few minutes.

Wrinkles knew what to expect next, and he cursed himself for not being able to overcome the feeling of nervousness that was passing over him. But he couldn't help himself; the habit was deepset.

When the loudspeaker announced that Frisco Jordan was to pinch hit for Oscar Frinelli, the stands went wild. But two seconds later, when it was announced that Schmo Dumbrowski was to relieve Chambers on the mound, the stands quieted down to a curious buzzing.

What kind of nonsense was the Falcons' manager pulling? the fans wanted to know. Was the guy off his nut?

Frisco Jordan, for one, apparently didn't think so. He still looked like a stretched out English butler, but the theatrical swagger was gone, and he was strangely pale.

As for Schmo, his insipid countenance looked inspired.

After a few arm throws the umpire hollered "Play ball!" and Frisco stepped up to the plate. Wrinkles studied the man responsible for so much of his aggravation of the past five years, and chuckled in pure delight.

Frisco's fidgetness increased as Schmo, looking as solemn as an old maid at a stag smoker, poised himself at the mound. After pinning Quincy to third with a threatening look, Schmo let go the first pitch. It was nothing fancy. Just a fast ball thrown straight, but Frisco let it pass for strike one. A cry of surprise went up from the stands.

"That's the ticket!" Wrinkles shouted jubilantly. "I always said the guy was no ball player."

Schmo gathered in the throw back, his face set like a statue. Wrinkles,

his heart making time, could almost count the beads of perspiration on the Jaybird batter's face. Frisco swung at the next pitch with all his power, but he swung too late. The ball was already resting snugly in Bogrow's mitt.

Loud boos were beginning to swell the stands.

Pitch number three was an exact duplication of the second one. Frisco's bat made a big wind, the fans made a big noise, and the big game was over. The flag was Falcon property, and Wrinkles whooped with delight. It felt good not to be unemployed.

THEY HOISTED the ecstatic Schmo on their shoulders and paraded him around the field. Wrinkles, for the first time in five years, as carefree as a sunbeam, went to pay Cassy O'Neill a visit.

"Well Cassy," Wrinkles said. "Looks like the free ride is over." He held out his hand. "No hard feelings?"

The Irishman was a good sport about it, he stuck his big paw into

Wrinkles' boney one.

"Tell me, MacDuff, how'd you get wise to Frisco?"

"After a full season," Wrinkles explained, "it finally penetrated my thick dome that any batter who can get into position for a pitch before the ball is even thrown, must know in advance what that pitch is gonna be. And for a guy to know that he's have to be a mind reader, so I got in touch with a pal of mine in Frisco's home town, and got a line on his theatrical background."

"Oh well," Casey sighed, "I knew you'd hit on it some time. I can't complain; I did okay, and I don't suppose Frisco'll mind going back to one-nighters. His heart was never in the game anyhow. But I gotta give you credit, MacDuff. Pitching Schmo Dumbrowski was a stroke of genius."

"It was the only logical thing to do," Wrinkles said matter-of-factly. "Schmo is the one guy on the team whose mind is too small to be read, even by a professional."

THE END

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946.

Of All Sports, published quarterly at Holyoke, Mass. for October 1, 1948

State of New York)
County of New York) ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Louis H. Silberkleit, who, having been duly sworn according to law deposes and says that he is the publisher of the All Sports and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and, if a daily, weekly, semi-weekly or tri-weekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations) printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business managers are:

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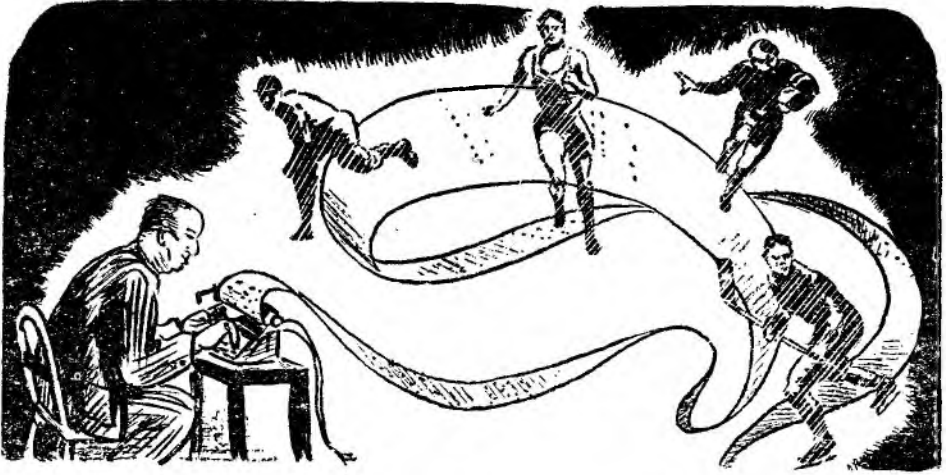
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LOUIS H. SILBERKLEIT
(Signature of Publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 14th day of September, 1948 Maurice Coyne. (My commission expires March 30 1950). (SEAL)



Dope From The Dugout

Facts & Fun From The Sports World

by Wilcey Earle

CAN'T BLAME HIM

A number of writers were visiting with Coach Johnny Corriden of the Yankees, and Johnny recalled the old story he used to tell of Jack Doyle, long-time scout for the Chicago Cubs.

From the home office, Doyle received a telegram ordering him to proceed to Fort Worth and look over a young outfielder named George Vernon Washington, afterward with the Chicago White Sox.

"George Washington," mused the scout. Feeling certain that the telegram had been designed in jest, he wired back: "Am proceeding as instructed to Fort Worth to look over George Washington. On way back, I will stop at Springfield, Ill., to look over Abraham Lincoln."

* * * *

Carroll Dempsey, the demon baseball statistician, writes us this highly interesting letter on

THE IMMORTALS OF BASEBALL

"A peculiar thing amongst the immortals of baseball is that there are only 14 names of the greatest of the great.

There are 2 first basemen, Gehrig and Sisler. There are 3 second basemen, Lajoie, Collins and Hornsby. There is 1 shortstop, Hans Wagner. There are 4 outfielders, Cobb, Speaker, Ruth and Keeler. There are 4 pitchers, Young, Matty, Johnson and Alexander. There are no catchers or third basemen listed.

I have seen all of the above men play baseball, and they all belong in the Hall of Fame and deserve to be listed as immortals, but I believe that a third baseman and also a catcher should be listed to keep them company.

Looking at catchers from Bresnahan and Kling right down to the present-day crop, I believe that Bill Dickey of the Yankees was the daddy of them all. Bill could hit a long ball

with the best of them and was as dangerous at the bat as any man on any of the great Yankee teams on which he played. He has hit better than 360 in a season, but his hitting was only half of it.

Who threw to the bases better than Dickey? In all of his World's Series and all Star games, who ever took any liberties and tried to go down to second on Bill?

The Cardinals stole Cochrane's glove in a World's Series. The same team could not steal on Dickey.

Who ever saw a Yankee pitcher shake off a sign in a World's Series? I never did and I don't believe that any of the Yank pitchers attempted to do so, as they knew that Bill knew his hitters and was the best judge of what to throw.

I don't have the facilities to find out how many bases were stolen on Dickey, but I know they were few and far between. I also know that Bill went a full season without having a passed ball. What a man!

Looking over the great third basemen from Jimmie Collins, Artie Lord, Art. Devlin, Harry Steinfeldt, Fred Lindstrom, etc., right down to the present crop, I would select Pie Traynor of Pittsburg as the outstanding star. He has hit as high as 350 and who could come in for bunts and throw them out like Pie in his prime?

The greatest compliment ever paid to Traynor was a remark of the late Miller Huggins, just after the 1927 World's Series, when the Yanks took the Pirates 4 games to 0.

Huggins said 'Well, we took the National League 4 to 0, and the only thing that the National showed us was how to play third base.'

Traynor was at his best all through the Series, and Huggins was convinced that Traynor was the daddy of them all at third base."

Two votes for Bill Dickey and Pie Traynor for the Hall of Fame."

Carroll, you said a mouthful.

Any dissenters?

AND SO IT WAS

When it comes to entertainment, some people prefer the drama, others like musical comedies, some go in for the movies and the remainder get a kick out of watching wrestling matches.

The latter isn't hard to understand, either. Because, in the catch-as-catch-can pastime, more genuine entertainment can be had than in any other form of diversion. Not only are the grimaces, burps and positions in which the matmen find themselves ludicrous, but the accompanying remarks in themselves are a vast source of amusement to the wrestling fans.

A short time ago, at the St. Nick Arena in New York City, The Swedish Angel, without a doubt the ugliest creature in the world, was wrestling Peter The Great, the bewhiskered Russian, who is the reincarnation of Rasputin, the Mad Monk.

After mopping up the ring and the adjoining ringside pews with each other's persons, with honors about even, The Angel, suddenly got Peter in a fierce scissors hold.

Then, as the crowd roared, he started to pluck the hairs out of Peter's whiskers, meanwhile chanting after each pluck, "She loves me, she loves me not."

A fan, sizing up the situation, quite appropriately yelled, "Attaboy, Angel—that's one for his whiskers!"

SPORTS QUIZ

Question No. 1: "What were the names of the two football teams that clashed in the memorable '12 men on the field' incident?"

Question No. 2: "In what fight was a boxer declared 'officially knocked out', only to come on after being granted a rest—to take the decision?"

Question No. 3: "What leading heavyweight of his time did Jack Dempsey knock out in 11 seconds?"

Question No. 4: "What two pitchers in the National League hurled no-hit ball against each other

for 9 innings, with one pitcher finally winning the game 1 to 0, when his teammates got a hit in the 10th?"

* * *

Answer No. 1: Dartmouth and Princeton at Palmer Stadium, Princeton, N. J.

Answer No. 2: The Tommy Loughran-Ray Impellitiere rumpus 12 years ago. Tommy won the decision over Ray after being declared "officially knocked out," when the bout was suddenly ordered continued by the Referee.

Answer No. 3 Fred Fulton.

Answer No. 4: Fred Toney, of the Cubs, beat "Shufflin'" Phil Douglas of the Giants in this one.

REASON ENOUGH

Over the body of a herring which fell easy prey to his knife and fork in Lindy's, Hy Weisberg, Brooklyn's Man-About-Sports, related to us the sad saga of a Kentucky hill-billy preacher outfielder, who turned down all offers to perform in the big league for a very strange reason.

It seems the manager of the big league club that had wanted to sign him saw tremendous possibilities in him as a second baseman, not as an outfielder, but he refused the job on moral grounds.

He refused to become involved—in twin killings!

SCREWY INDEED

Your peregrinating paragraph pilferer bumped into his old pal, Jimmy Durante, at the fites recently.

For some reason or other, the conversation veered to bands.

"How did you like the band that played for you in Cincinnati?" we ventured.

"Screwy as hell," Jimmy growled, "the cornetist was playing the flute, the piano player was playing the trumpet, and the saxophonist was playing the horses!"

WHAT A RELIEF

There have been many funny yarns about drunks at the race track, but to our mind, the following hits the hilarity jackpot.

A stew was staggering past a stall in which a race horse and a dog were parked. Suddenly, the horse snarled at him, "You drunken bum, why don't you lay off that stuff?"

"Omigawd!" cried the souse, turning to the dog, "did you say that?"

"No, he did," replied the hound, pointing to the horse.

"Thank Gawd," sighed the stew, "for a moment, I thought I was going crazy. I thought I heard a talking dog!"



The slim forward
couldn't get loose.



ROOKIE COACH

by WILLIAM F. FITZGERALD

*Everyone agreed that this was Baldwin's first and last season
as coach . . .*

RED EVERTS saw the blow coming, but there wasn't time to duck. He felt the heavy fist smash against his jaw, and he crashed backward across a wooden bench, and sprawled onto the floor.

The lanky, red haired boy raked the back of his hand across his mouth, stared dazedly for a moment at the blood which came away, and then as full realization set in he shoved himself forward angrily to get at his attacker. Coach Johnny Baldwin chose that moment to step into the dressing room.

The State coach walked immediately to Everts, extended his hand and helped the red head to his feet.

"Okay Red?" he asked solicitously. Everts shook his head stubbornly.

still glaring at Mike Sweeney, the blond sophomore guard who had knocked him down.

Baldwin swung back toward Sweeney. "You couldn't have picked a worse time Sweeney," he said coldly, "maybe you can explain how come?"

"I guess not, this time Coach," Mike Sweeney said.

Baldwin shook his head regretfully. "You don't leave me much choice," he said, "I guess we can't use you tonight Sweeney. The rest of you guys get dressed."

He started from the room but paused beside little Danny Burton, Sweeney's best friend. "It looks like it's up to you kid," was all he said.

"What a night," Danny murmured

sadly, "all I have to do is stop Buddy Walsh."

On the other side of the campus, in the University hospital, a white haired man lay propped up in bed listening to the girl seated beside him.

"No matter what happens tonight," Pop Anson broke in softly, "we can both be proud of Johnny Baldwin. He took everything they dished out, and never let out a yelp."

The girl blinked back ready tears. "No Pop," Ann Bailey agreed, "you were a good teacher."

Pop Anson shut his eyes, and gradually the shriekings of the radio, and the everyday corridor sounds of the hospital faded out, and he was seeing two freshman basketball teams scrimmage. He had been headed for Varsity practice, and had stopped for a word with Frosh Coach Tom Malory.

"See that kid over there," Tom said pointing at a well proportioned, good looking six footer, "he's green as grass, but I think he's your type Pop. He's sure a scrapper."

Pop watched a few minutes longer. The kid, Tom explained, was named Johnny Baldwin, and he was from a small Kansas town. He moved fast and gracefully, and seemed to have a fine basket eye, but it was also easy to see he had a lot to learn.

Pop Anson taught him the next four years, and Johnny Baldwin was All American as a senior. From a reserved, shy small town boy whose heroes had always been Pop Anson and the State basketball stars, Johnny Baldwin developed into as great a name as any of them.

"You've been like a father to him," he heard Ann Bailey say.

"Yes," Pop thought, "and he's been like a son to me." Pop had never had a son, and Johnny Baldwin hadn't had a father since he was ten. It was a natural, binding affection the two had developed toward each other, and after Pop's accident he had pulled the strings that moved Johnny Baldwin from assistant coach to head coach.

He had done this despite considerable opposition...opposition which Pop knew was still close to the surface. Still, he told himself, no matter

how it turned out he would believe he had done the right thing.

The voice of the announcer sharpened, and Pop knew the game was about ready to get underway. The announcer started on the lineups: "For Central: Buddy Walsh and Jim Stormer, forwards; Ed Stormer, center; and Vince Smith and Jug Ryan, guards. For State: Bud Watts and Jim Turner, forwards; Al McLeod, center; and Red Everts and Danny Burton, guards." The announcer paused, then rumbled on, "Burton is a surprise starter in place of Mike Sweeney, who doesn't seem to be suited up tonight. So far we have received no explanation."

Pop Anson put his head in his hands and groaned. "Things weren't bad enough," he murmured, "now we have to lose Sweeney."

Out on the State court, Danny Burton shook hands with Buddy Walsh the high scoring Central forward. "Where's my pal Sweeney?" Walsh asked good naturedly.

Danny Burton put more confidence into his grin than he felt. "We're saving Mike for big games," he said.

The capacity crowd was momentarily quiet as the referee prepared to toss up the first ball. State got in the first lick as Al McLeod leaped high to bat the ball to Jim Turner. The advantage was short lived as Buddy Walsh snagged Turner's attempted pass to McLeod.

It was Walsh to Stormer to Smith and back to Walsh for Central's first basket on a neat fast break. A few moments later Walsh got back of Danny Burton to whip in his second basket. Then Ed Stormer took over for two baskets on his favorite pivot shot. Red Everts hit a 20-footer to make it 8-2 after four minutes had passed.

"Where's Sweeney?" the Kansas City World sports editor demanded of the State Daily's sports editor.

The student editor shook his head dejectedly. "Darned if I know," he admitted, "it looks like a bad evening."

"Johnny Baldwin's first and last season as State coach," the World editor said.

State fought back with Al McLeod clinging to Ed Stormer like an evening gown. Danny Burton, however, was having his troubles with Buddy Walsh. The smooth Central forward was fast and clever.

Pop Anson, tense beside his radio, shook his head glumly. "They've got to find a way to stop that boy," he told Ann Bailey.

Central led 16-8 with ten minutes gone, and Ed Stormer brought the State crowd to its feet for the first time with two fast pivot shots which hit. Walsh got one back on a fast break which Red Everts nullified with another long one. Central kept its margin, but couldn't increase it. They led 26-19 at the half.

JOHNNY BALDWIN dug his hands deep into his pockets and started for the dressing room. *Anyway, he thought grimly, it's not the first licking I've taken in the last few months.* At the moment, the season seemed more like two years than two months long.

Everybody had had State headed for one of the greatest seasons in its long and glorious history under Pop Anson. True, they had lost All American Johnny Baldwin, but they had Al McLeod and Red Everts and Butch Tennant and Bud Watts and a comer in Jim Turner to take Baldwin's place.

Then came Pop Anson's serious automobile accident the week after practice started. Still, the experts figured State would be hard to stop. Most of them figured Ralph Everts, the intramural director, would take over.

When it was announced that Johnny Baldwin was taking Pop's place, the screaming was loud and long. No one screamed louder than Ralph Everts, whose son Red was one of the team's mainsprings.

"But he's just a kid," Ralph protested to Athletic Director Stacy Barnes, "the board must be crazy."

"The Board has a lot of confidence in Pop Anson," Stacy Barnes pointed out, "and Pop told them Johnny was the man for the job."

Pop Anson had never been a target

for criticism at State, but he became one overnight. Charges of "favoritism", and "politics", were heard from all sides. The varsity basketball squad, stunned at first by Pop's accident, listened to the gossip skeptically at first, and then gradually followed Red Everts' lead in lining up against Johnny Baldwin.

"I've got problem children," Johnny confessed to Ann Bailey after the second week of practice, "and I don't know if I can handle them."

"Why Coach," Ann had said, arching her eyebrows, "if Pop had had any doubts about whether you could or not you wouldn't have the job now."

He smiled down at her. "If it weren't for you Ann, and for Pop, I'd tell them what they could do with their bloody job, and let Ralph Everts have it," he admitted.

"You'd do no such thing, and you know it," Ann came back spiritedly. "And," she added, "if I didn't love you so much I'd bawl you out for even saying such a thing."

State opened with Westminster, a small, nearby denominational school and it was anything but the breather for which it had been scheduled. The small school boys rushed into an early lead, and, sensing a chance for an upset, outfought their favored opponents throughout the first half. They led 23-17 at the half, and Johnny Baldwin fought to gain control of himself as he went to the dressing room. He won the battle.

The regulars were seated listlessly around the room when he entered, and they didn't look up at him. "Okay," he started, "it looks as though we underestimated these jokers. Since we're taking a beating anyway we might as well give the reserves some experience. The second team will start."

The regulars looked at each other unbelievably as Johnny Baldwin walked back out of the room.

Mike Sweeney, the big sophomore guard, and little Danny Burton went right to work on the lead. Mike was no Johnny Baldwin, but he was fast and willing and a driver. The reserves caught the tiring Westminster team, and pulled away to win easily.

"State fans were not satisfied with what they saw last night," the World sports editor said in his column. "While State won, it was not the spectacular team the fans had expected to see. Instead, it was five unknown boys led by Mike Sweeney, who pulled the game out of the fire while five of the midwest's greatest stars watched the second half from the bench. State needs Pop Anson back."

"Baloney," Pop Anson snorted when he read the piece. "They need me like I need another broken leg."

Johnny Baldwin didn't look too cheerful. "They hate my guts now if they didn't before, all five of them," he said. "I wish you were back, Pop."

"They don't hate you, Johnny," said, "they're just a little jealous of you. Red Everts is at the bottom of the whole thing, and don't forget he was pretty stuck on Ann until you came along. They'll get over it."

"I hope it isn't too late," Johnny said.

OREGON STOPPED off in Kansas City on their way back home from a successful eastern tour, and State got its first major test. And, if anything, the regulars were more listless than they were in the Westminster game, and Johnny yanked them with four minutes remaining in the first half.

Mike Sweeney's team gained four points before intermission, but Oregon went in leading 24-20. Johnny left his reserves in and they made a real fight of it, but two last minute baskets by the Oregon center was the clincher.

State picked up two wins during Christmas vacation, but they were with small schools, and they didn't look sensational at any time. Criticism of Johnny Baldwin began to snowball, and Ralph Everts and his friends were around to see that the ball kept rolling.

"I'm wasting my time," Johnny told Ann, "I'd better get into something legitimate like selling black market cars before I lose my reputation."

"You do," Ann told him, "and you'll lose your girl friend."

"You don't love me," Johnny accused her, grinning, "you just go with me to mold my character."

"You're already quite a character," Ann said, "but I do love you Johnny, and I'd marry you if you were coaching a losing girl's hockey team."

"That's good enough for me," Johnny said, "I couldn't quit with a deal like that."

They opened the conference season at Central against a Bearcat team which was unnecessarily hot. Big Ed Stormer played rings around Al McLeod, and Buddy Walsh got 18 points to lead the barrage. It was 55-30 at the finish, and even the reserves couldn't get going.

"We've got him where we want him now," Ralph Everts said exultantly to his son, "a couple more like that and Johnny and Pop will both be out. They'll have to give me the job."

"Johnny maybe," Red said, "he needs to be taken down a peg. But Pop is as good as they come. He'll be back next year."

"Don't be too sure," Ralph said, "don't forget that Pop went against the Board's judgment in putting Johnny in. They won't forget when they start wondering what happened to their national championship club."

Red shook his head dubiously. He was still loyal to Pop Anson although he thought his father should have had the job over Johnny Baldwin.

Johnny himself was thoroughly dejected. "I can't bring 'em out of it," he told Pop, "they won't work for me."

"Now you know why coaches get old fast Johnny," Pop said, "you've picked up more wrinkles in two weeks than you were able to get in 23 years before."

"I won't get old fast Pop," Johnny said, "I won't last that long."

"You can do it if anyone can," Pop said calmly. "Of all the boys I've ever coached, you're the only one I'd have given this job to. And," he went on, "you know I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been sure."

But Pop was more worried than he cared to admit. He sent for Al Mc-

Leod that evening. Pop had made Al into one of the country's better centers, and he thought the big fellow had enough respect for him to listen sensibly.

Pop let him have both barrels. He told how Johnny had taken the job at his insistence, and how he believed jealousy, more than anything else, was the basis for the Everts' objections. Al McLeod left the room feeling very sheepish, but with a changed viewpoint.

Pop also had a visit from Athletic Director Stacy Barnes. Stacy was blunt. "It's not too late to change," he said, "and it would take a lot of pressure off both of us. After all, you're entitled to a mistake now and then."

"Stacy," Pop said grimly, "if you think this was a mistake you can accept my resignation as of now. That's the way I feel about it."

"Okay," Stacy said, accepting the decision. "I hope you're not sorry." He gripped Pop's hand as he went out. Pop knew Stacy would back his decision to the limit.

AL McLEOD was in top form against Tech, and it was a fortunate thing. The big center scored 20 points, and Mike Sweeney had five field goals in a 50-46 squeak. Red Everts, Jim Turner, Bud Watts and Butch Tennant were along for the ride.

There was no letup from the press, but Johnny found consolation in McLeod's showing. He looked up the big center after the game.

"Pop would have been proud of you tonight," he told Al warmly, "keep that up and there isn't a center in the business who can touch you."

"Thanks Johnny," Al said warmly, "maybe we can light a fire under some of these other guys."

Al succeeded with Butch Tennant. The burly guard liked the game too well to let any personal feelings affect his playing very long. "After all," Al pointed out, "Johnny didn't ask for the job. He took it because Pop asked him to. You'd have done the same thing wouldn't you Butch?"

Butch admitted that he probably would. They might have succeeded

with Jim Turner and Bud Watts if it hadn't been for Red. The three were inseparable, and the red haired guard kept his friends in line.

They came through against Trenton, the Aggies and Montrose as expected, but not by the overwhelming margins by which Central whipped the same teams. The sportwriters were already booming Central for the N.C.A.A. playoffs, and Ed Stormer and Buddy Walsh for All American mention.

Johnny Baldwin took each game as it came, refusing to think further ahead than that. Several times, he had caught himself on the verge of tearing into Red Everts, and perhaps firing him off the team. But he knew he would be playing right into Ralph Everts' hands. They would say Pop was wrong for sure then, hiring a young whippersnap who couldn't even control himself, let alone a basketball team.

He had another worry. Pop wasn't coming back like the doctors had expected him to. Johnny tried to appear as cheerful as possible when he got in to see Pop.

Once Pop told him, "You look as though you'd just had a hearty man to man talk with a ghost, and decided to let the ghost come in to see me in instead."

Johnny forced a grin. "Indigestion," he murmured lamely.

"Just wait," Pop said, "next year it'll be ulcers. This coaching business is tough, but I wouldn't give anything for the years I've been in it. If you ever expect sympathy though you'd better get into something else. The public will pat you on the back one minute, and use the same hand to stick a knife into you the next."

McLeod and Tennant and Sweeney and Danny Burton fought down through the tag end of the season, and again they edged Tech, and slipped past Trenton, the Aggies and Montrose. Then Central ran into an unexpected snag in Tech, and dropped a 42-41 heartbreaker on Tech's court.

So it was State and Central battling through to their final game with an invitation to the western N.C.A.A.

tournament looming ahead as an added prize. Fans and writers alike were saying that State would have to show more than they had in the past to make a battle of it.

Then fresh disaster fell. Butch Tennant crashed to the floor during scrimmage, and sprained an ankle.

"And that," Ralph Everts announced triumphantly to his son, "is that. You can say goodbye to Johnny Baldwin."

"You really want us to lose don't you Dad?" Red asked. The thought came as a shock to him.

"Well," Ralph hedged, "it would be better for the school in the long run don't you think? We'd be rid of Johnny Baldwin."

"I don't know," Red said, "he's been mighty patient. Sometimes I feel sorry for him. After all, I think he's doing it for Pop more than for himself."

"Bosh!" Ralph Everts snorted indignately, "he's doing it for Johnny Baldwin. And he's not patient, he's just plain stupid."

Red wasn't entirely convinced. He had been doing a lot of thinking since Al McLeod had switched to Johnny's side. Al was a pretty smart boy in Red's opinion.

"I hate to ask it of you Mike," Johnny Baldwin said. "If you don't like the idea let's skip it."

The two of them were seated in Johnny's office. Mike Sweeney ran his hand through his hair and sighed.

"It won't be pleasant," he admitted, "but frankly, I can't think of any other way to snap those guys out of it. Red doesn't like me because you've been playing me in his position so much. Maybe this could do it."

"I appreciate your even considering it Mike," Johnny said, dismissing the subject, "I won't hold it against you any way you decide."

"I'll do it," Mike said firmly, "after all, I think Red's got it coming to him."

THE DRESSING room was very quiet when Mike Sweeney made his pitch. "You know," Mike said loudly, "it would be a shame if we

lost this game, especially since it isn't necessary."

Red Everts recognized the bait, and took a nibble. "Just what are you driving at Sweeney," he asked brusquely.

Red glared back at him. "At you my friend," he said loudly, "I say you've been holding back on us for personal reasons, and personally, I think that's about as low as a guy can get."

"Why you," Red began as he started for Sweeney. Sweeney timed the punch beautifully, and Everts walked right into it. Johnny Baldwin picked that moment for his entrance.

"Listen," Pop Anson told Ann Bailey, "get me my pants and get out of here. I've got business to take care of."

"You're crazy," Ann said, "you wouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"Oh, wouldn't I," Pop said. He started to swing off the edge of the bed, and Ann gasped, and did as she was told. It was nearly time for the second half to begin.

Johnny looked up as Red Everts pushed into his office. The boy looked downright docile, and Johnny began to hope again.

"Listen Johnny," Red said urgently, "it's about Mike Sweeney. Maybe he had a right to sock me tonight. I've been thinking it over, and I'm not so sure I haven't been wrong about some things. How about letting him play in my place?"

Johnny came around the desk with outstretched hand. "You mean that Red," he asked warmly. Everts nodded.

"Okay, that's fine," he announced, "only you'll stay in Red. Mike will take Danny's place."

Red's eyes shone. "Thanks a lot Coach," he said sincerely.

After he had gone Johnny walked over and opened the equipment room door. "Mike," he called jubilantly, "it worked. Maybe that punch in the jaw jarred us right into the middle of this ball game."

Mike clenched his right fist, and

waved it triumphantly. "What a puncher," he said, "I'm in the wrong business Coach."

AL McLEOD outstretched Ed Stormer for the first tip, and Bud Watts moved in smartly to deflect the ball back over his right shoulder to Red Everts. Red and Mike Sweeney came barrelling in on the lone Central guard, and at the last second Red hook-passed to Mike who laid the ball up. The State fans howled. This looked like what they had been hoping for all season.

Ed Stormer got the points back on a dazzling one hander from just outside the free throw circle, but Red Everts and Mike teamed up again to make it 28-23 as Red drove on through. When McLeod hit from the post Ed Stormer called time for Central.

Mike Sweeney grinned at Red Everts in the huddle. "You son of a gun," he said, "I always heard you were the best guard who ever suited up around here, and right now you're making me believe it."

"You aren't doing bad yourself," Red came back, his hand on Mike's shoulder.

"Now you're talking," Jim Turner said, "we'll be playing in the Garden yet."

But Central was far from through. With Mike clinging to him desperately, Buddy Walsh hit Stormer with a perfect lead, and the giant laid it in. Then Mike failed to apply the brakes in time to miss Walsh, and the Central forward added another point. It was 31-25 with eight minutes gone.

Mike passed to Red who passed to Jim Turner in midcourt. The slim forward couldn't get loose, and gave it back to Red. He had a split second before his man came up to cover him, and there was no one open. The red head let go a long, high one that took its time coming down. There was a gasp, then a roar as the ball skimmed through the netting.

Vince Smith hit from the side for Central, and Al McLeod got it back on a twisting jump shot. Central 33, State 29. Vince Smith passed in carelessly to Buddy Walsh, but the ball never got to its target as Jim Turner

pounded in to steal the ball. As Smith, thoroughly chagrined, came up to cover Turner, the State forward passed off to Sweeney who went all the way in to score. The gym was in a continuous uproar.

Danny Burton grinned happily at Johnny Baldwin. "You've got yourself a ball club," he said.

Johnny watching, told himself he had never been so proud or so happy. They can fire me now, he told himself, at least I'll know I had a ball club working together before the season was entirely over.

Al McLeod tied it up, and Red Everts put State ahead with another long one. With Mike Sweeney stopping Walsh cold, the Central offensive couldn't get going. With a minute left, and the score 50-42 Johnny put his reserves in. "This time," he told Danny Burton, "I'm not asking you to pull a game out of the fire for me."

Johnny left the State players to battle off the fans as well as they could, and started fighting his own way out of the gym. "Good gosh," he thought once, "my back will be hamburger when I get out of here." The thought made him grin. "At least they're patting me and not stabbing me this time," he said to himself.

He heard the clatter of high heels, and felt two arms go around his neck. "Oh Johnny," Ann Bailey said, "you did it."

"Sure he did it," another deeper voice broke in. Johnny whirled unbelievably, certain that he must be dreaming. It was a beaming Pop Anson on crutchers, who reached out to take his protege's hand.

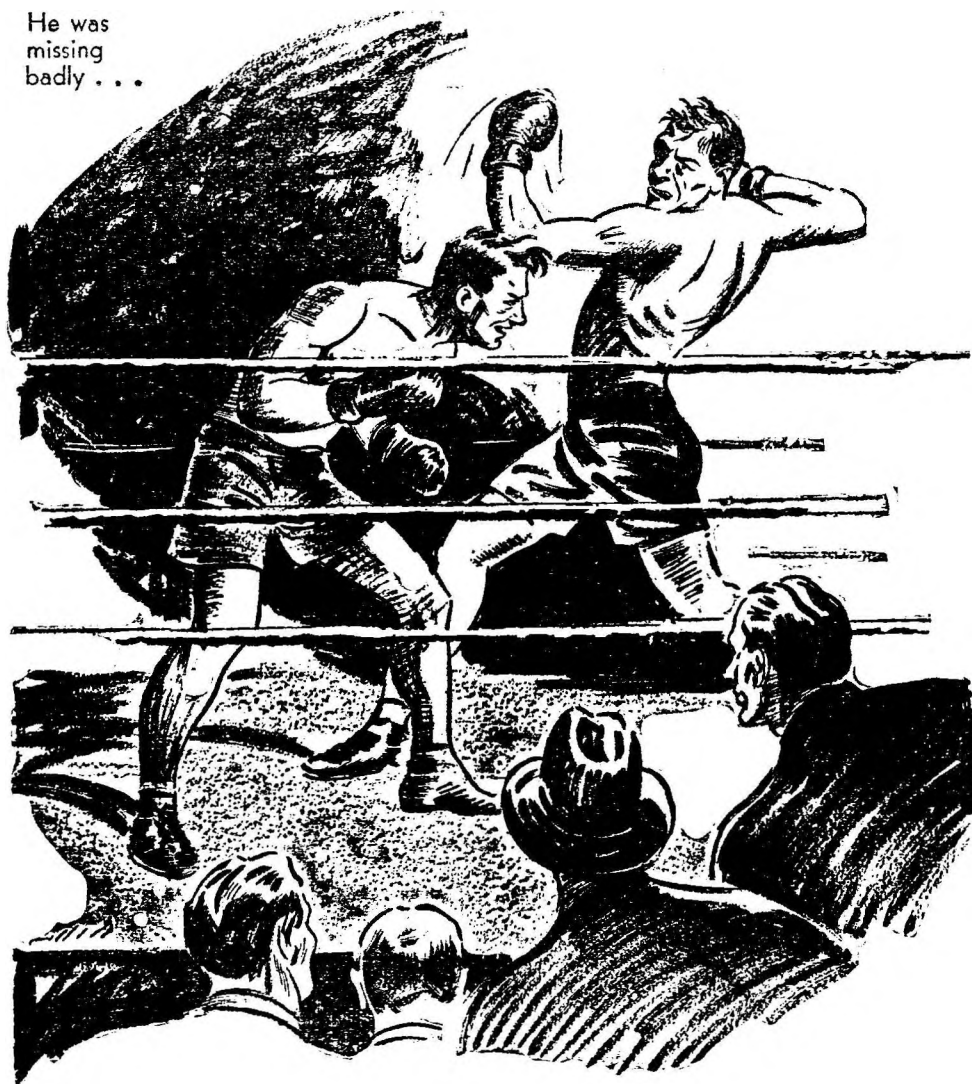
"Pop," Johnny said happily, "you're back to take over for the tournament. You made it just in time."

Pop shook his head. "That's your department," he said chuckling, "I'm the new athletic director around here now. Stacy Barnes is retiring, and my first appointment is Johnny Baldwin as head basketball coach."

"You can close your mouth now Johnny," Ann said demurely, "there's

(Continued On Page 97)

He was
missing
badly . . .



Punchin' Rudy

By TOM DOWLING, JR.

I could have taken you easily a few years ago; you leave yourself wide open—but my head hurts and it's hard to remember what I'm doing. But someday I'll be champ, then

RUDY CRAMER saw Dumpy Roberts' right coming at his head and he rolled with the punch. But it still stung and Rudy grabbed quickly. The cries of the fight mob rang in his buzzing head; Roberts pumped his fists into Rudy's ribs and they hurt.

They forget quick, Rudy thought. They forget the day I could lick this bum with one arm tied to my ankle. Yeah, they forget quick, all right.

Rudy pushed out of the clinch and slammed his own right into Dumpy's face twice. The rough little guy just grunted like an enraged hippo and charged in again. Rudy tried to duck a swooping left hook and fell right into an uppercut. The bells started ringing in his head; he grabbed Dumpy again and wrapped his hairy arms about him.

I could of made you mince meat in my day, fella. I could of. You telegraph those punches. I could of chopped you up in little pieces. But I ain't a spring chicken no more; I'm tired.

The bell rang and Rudy looked around for his corner. Sam Smythe waved at him and dropped the stool onto the floor. Rudy staggered over and plopped into it heavily.

"You're doin' great, Rudy," Sam said, his cigar unlit between yellow teeth. "Just great."

"Yeah," Rudy sighed. "What round is it?"

"That was the fourth, you goon. Six more to go."

Rudy leaned back. He was tired, and blood flowed from three old cuts. "After this I can quit, eh, Sam? I can go get a job as a riveter or something, ch, Sam?"

Sam didn't answer; he worked roughly on Rudy's cuts. Rudy felt sick to his stomach. The buzzing in his head wouldn't go away.

I'd like to be a riveter. That's nice work compared to this. I'm fed up with being punched around. Should of quit seven, eight years ago. I'm tired.

The bell rang for the fifth and Rudy felt Sam's fingers jab into his back. "Okay. Go get 'im."

He went out and stood flat-footed as Dumpy charged. The right was telegraphed again, but Rudy took it anyway. He tried to duck away, but the co-ordination wasn't there; there was a great pressure against the top of his head. He lashed out with a left and right and felt them hit home.

Dumpy Roberts fell into the ropes. Rudy came to him slowly, his legs heavy weights that seemed to drag him back. He rammed another right into Dumpy's face and then something popped inside his head.

He was suddenly down on his hands and knees, staring at the legs of his opponent as they trotted to a neutral corner.

When I was in my prime I'da butchered you, fella. You'd be down here and I'd be up there. My head hurts. Getting punchy, all right. The boys at the gym are right. I see them shaking their heads while I'm working out. I see them.

RUDY LOOKED up at the referee's swinging arm. "Five—"

Five, eh? Gee, that count goes fast. Fast like the great days I once had. Me, the heavyweight champ. Fast were the days, and fast was I. Think maybe I oughta quit now. There's no sense getting up. He'll only knock me down again. I can get a job as a welder or something.

Rudy got up when he heard *Nine*. The referee wiped his gloves and eyed him warily.

Don't look at me like that, Harry. I ain't hurt. Just tired, Harry. Very tired and old. You're no diaper-wearer yourself, Harry. You were there the night I knocked the crown off Dan Gerben's noggin, remember? You raised my glove that night, Harry. The new champ, you called me, remember?

Dumpy rushed at Rudy, grinning, anxious for the kill. Rudy thwacked a jab into Dumpy's face and drew a trickle of blood from the nose. Dumpy Roberts froze for a moment, then rushed again. His heavy blows made Rudy's head ache the more. There were bits of burning coal in there where Rudy's brain should have been. He lashed out to Dumpy's head and hit the air. Another right caught him on the jaw and he wanted to go down, but didn't.

When I go down it'll be 'cause I'm put there. May be punchy, but I ain't no quitter. Like the time Sam wanted me to dive for Lonny Ever-

est—or was it Tiny McCall? Oh well, that was a long time ago. I didn't do it though. I knocked Jess Abel cock-eyed instead. Or was it Everest—or McCall? Can't remember. My head hurts... Who's this? Oh yeah, Dumpy Roberts. He's licking me.

He sunk his right into Roberts' stomach and heard the man groan in pain. Again he hit the same spot and Roberts backed away.

Can't take it downstairs, eh? Just like Freddie Jordan, that colored fella I fought in Philly once. He was a good boy, strong and smart. He'da cut you to ribbons, guy. But I beat him. For three rounds he pounded me around until I got his number. The bread basket. He couldn't take 'em there. Knocked him out in the fifth or sixth. Can't remember which. Yes-sir! Freddie Clack was a good boy.

Dumpy was hurt more than Rudy knew. He sucked in air, trying to hold himself up. He grabbed Rudy, but got hit twice, hard. Rudy watched Dumpy go down on his back.

Okay, Harry. I'll go to a neutral corner. Just like you pushed me the night I dropped Benny the Doll. Remember? My first title defense, it was. No, that's right, you weren't the ref that night, were you? It was someone else... Oh well, I beat the guy's brains out. My head started hurting after that. His must have too 'cause he quit the ring. Maybe I can quit after tonight. Sam'll let me quit this time.

The referee tolled off the count and when he reached Four, Dumpy Roberts got to his knees, shaking his head. Rudy watched him and heard a woman at ringside scream, "Get up, Dumpy. Get up, honey."

She's calling for you to get up, Roberts. May called for me to get up once, I remember. She was a great gal, May. Built like a dream and smart, she was. Helped me spend my money when I was in the big time. We were gonna get married, May and me. We made a good combination. I earned lots of dough and she knew how to dress. Sam always dressed nice too, but I never was much for clothes.

Guess it was only right that May should start running around with Sam. But they ain't married yet. Maybe if I win back the title she'll come back to me. I dunno.

"Get up, Dumpy," the female voice shouted. "Get up, you bum."

That ain't nice, lady. You shouldn't call the guy a bum. May called me that after I lost the title. That's when she began going around with Sam. A bum she called me. I told her no I was no bum. Told her I'd win back the crown. I'm still trying, ain't I? A guy's no bum when he keeps trying. But now I'm tired and my head hurts. Maybe I am a bum.

DUMPY ROBERTS got up just in time and went into his shell. Rudy took his time coming at him, and the bell sounded. He went to his corner and Sam was grinning.

"The gate's good tonight, Rudy. There's good dough in this match. I'm a pretty shrewd operator, eh, Rudy?"

"Yeah," Rudy said, closing his eyes. "But I'm tired, Sam."

"Never mind that, you bum. Think of the dough."

Dough? What dough? I never see much of it. But I don't care no more. I want the title back. Or maybe I ought to be a truck driver, or something. Oh, my head hurts.

"You got him now, Rudy. Just keep belting his guts. He can't take that. Keep it up and we'll be on top again."

Rudy went out for the sixth, his legs heavier than ever. Dumpy was still groggy. He stayed in his shell and fired a big gun now and then. It always landed, and Rudy's head throbbed.

You ain't no dummy, fella. You know how to fight. Someday maybe you'll be top man, if you learn to quit telegraphing those punches. I was top man once. Smart and young, I was, like you. I learned the hard way... Okay, Harry, I'll break the clinch... You remember, Harry? I was a tough kid from a tough town. The cops were always nabbing me for something. Always in trouble and al-

ways taking the rap for somebody else. The gang did it, and I got the blame. Like the time Sid, or was it Johnnie—oh well, somebody broke old man Dubber's store window. They caught me. Afterwards the gang beat me up 'cause somebody talked. But it wasn't me. It wasn't me. I remember.

Rudy's head blazed now. Dumpy was throwing hard and plenty. Rudy's brain was afire. He staggered backward as Roberts laid it on.

Punchy they say I am. But maybe I'm not. I can remember the night I fought my first pro fight. The champ was my opponent. —No, that couldn't be right. Maybe that was later. I dunno. . . . I didn't rat on the gang. . . . May made me spend all that money. . . . Sam was my friend. . . . Mince meat I could of made out of you, guy, when I was on top. . . . I'd make a good riveter or something. . . . My head hurts and I'm tired.

The referee watched Rudy as he whipped his arm up and down in the count. "Eight," he yelled.

Rudy jumped up, everything a mess inside his head.

That's May calling for me to knock him out. Okay, May, honey, I'll knock out this guy Timmy Calhoun. I'm the champ, Calhoun. You can't get tough with me. I never been beat in my life. . . . Hey, you don't look like Calhoun. . . . What's the difference. You're all a bunch of bums. . . . There! How'd you like that one? Here's another, Granger, or whatever your name is. And another for good measure. . . . Oh, my head hurts. It hurts something awful.

"Get over in the corner, Rudy," the referee yelled.

RUDY GRINNED and his eyes were glassy. He bounced over to a neutral corner, almost falling on his face. He waved to the crowd, grinning blankly.

"Tell May I'm champ again, Sam," he shouted. "Tell her I'm on top again."

Then the referee was raising his arm and yelling "the winner!"

Rudy trotted to his corner and Sam grinned at him. "Nice going, Rudy. Pretty soon we'll be in the chips again."

Rudy yelled at the crowd as he went back to the dressing room. He cupped his hands over his head.

Once inside the room he stretched out on the rubbing table, his chest pounding and his head spinning crazily. "Now I can be a welder or something, eh Sam?"

Sam lighted his cigar at last.

Rudy closed his eyes painfully. "Now I'm champ I can quit and get a job as a riveter, eh Sam?"

"You ain't champ, you bum," Sam snarled. "But you will be. Next we'll get a fight with Drummer McCoy. After you lick him we'll get Spence, then Dumlow. We're going to the top, Rudy, you and me. We're getting to be a drawing card again."

But I want to be a truck driver. I'm tired of fighting, Sam. . . . Tell May I won, Sam. . . . Oh, my head hurts. It hurts something terrible, Sam. . . . Okay, Sam, I'm no quitter. I'll fight again. Then maybe someday I can be a riveter or something, eh Sam? . . . Oh, my head, my head. It hurts like the night I fought Joe Climer—or was it George Bannon. . . . I can't remember—



Bulldog on the Baseline

By ERIC ROBER
(Author of "Bat Magic")

Long Joe Palme figured he had to do more than beat Randy Bland; he had to play it with culture and strategy, and curb the way he felt about the snobs he faced across the net,

HE WENT into his backhand corner and dug out that low-bouncing chop shot. A drive straight down the sideline could be a placement. Dangerous of course with the pellet likely to go out at any point. Then Long Joe Palme remembered the Tessard court strategy: never give an opponent a chance at the big angle unless you know you've got him passed. So Long Joe held himself in, throttled his normal what-the-hell, shoot-the-works attitude and stroked it deep to the center of Judge's baseline. Judge was one of the fastest men in the game, capable of retrieving a ball to any part of his court. But Long Joe swore under his breath as he gave up the gambling opportunity.

They swapped drives, Judge working in those treacherous chop shots. Long Joe kept him deep behind his baseline with those flat powerful forehand shots of his. Then Judge was short with a chopped shot, and Long Joe rushed up past mid court, took it on the volley, and angled it off sharply cross court for the point. That was part of Lou Tessard system, to strike only when the opening came ripe and flush. The Tessard system of strategy and strokes, with the latter the mere implement, the tools of the trade. And finisher to be applied only after constant forcing pressure had forced a foe into a mechanical or strategic miscue.

There was a sharp spatter of applause from the gallery for the sharp efficiency with which he'd taken the point. Long Joe smiled a little and unconsciously swaggered as he moved to receive service. Actually those were restrained gestures for him.

Everything he did on a court now was restrained instead of in his former completely uninhibited extroverted style. He tossed his black shock of unruly hair, then raked a hand through it, a little tensed-up from remembering to hold both his old sock-and-rock-'em game in abeyance as well as himself.

Then Judge, backed to the wall, pulled the string on his service. And an ace snapped by Long Joe. "30-40," the umpire intoned the score from his high stool. Joe Palme started to take a kick at the clay surface, then caught himself. No more of that crude temperament stuff, of giving the crowd an exhibition of temper. He had to live down that "court rough-neck" reputation, Tessard had warned him repeatedly.

Judge served again from the other court. Long Joe blocked it back with a backhand. Judge followed his long drive into the net. Long Joe itched to lash out at it with his powerful forehand and try for a passing shot. Instead, mindful of his recent tutoring, he sent over a drop shot that dived short after crossing the net. Judge had to half volley it off his toes. It broke his smooth progress netward.

Long Joe pulled him to his left with one to the backhand, then whipped to the other side. Not set, kept on the defensive, Judge sent up a floating weak return. Long Joe cruised in and took it before the bounce and loosed a forehand drive for a slashing passing shot and the game. Still it would have been more exhilarating to have tried to pass Judge when he first came up.



Complete Tennis Novel

"Game, Mr. Palme. Games, 5-3, Mr. Palme leading, Fourth set."

JOE PALME took over service, rifled one ace past his rival, forced him to hit outside off another delivery. Then discarding the Tessaard technique temporarily, he tried for another ace, missed, cut loose on his second ball. A double fault. And

then Judge kept chopping, chopping; finally the over-eager Long Joe netted one of those back-spin balls of his backhand to deuce it up. The stands applauded Judge for his game attempt at a comeback. And Joe Palme reddened, sensing the antipathy he'd roused in galleries before. He crashed another ace past Judge for 'vantage in.

But Judge returned the next serve and rushed the net, forced to gamble. Joe just got one of his cross-court shots on the end of his racket, then was almost passed on his exposed backhand. Judge sent a half-speed shot down the center after being almost beaten by a fierce forehand drive. And Long Joe, discarding his new-style game, ran up, swung into his left court to run around the ball and take it on his forehand. He passed Judge for the match, hurled the net, then shook with him.

And he remembered something as he started to pull on his worn Camel coat. He trotted down to the end of the court, to the baseline judge just rising from his chair. Earlier in the match, when the line official had erred badly on a ball out by six inches, Long Joe had ceased play to stare at him and finally chuckle away as if regarding a clown.

"Awfully sorry about that gag I pulled before, Mr. Glennon," Joe Palme said sincerely. "I get sorta—well, cockeyed on a court, I guess."

The linesman said it was okay. Long Joe, a flat-bodied loose-shouldered kid just under six feet, moved into the awninged marquee at the end of the line of courts. His quick-darting eyes was alight with a satisfied grin. He'd just knocked off this Judge in four sets, Judge, a player in the first twenty in the national rankings. While not sensational, Judge was one of those experienced steady players who could polish you off if your game slipped a single notch. A sports writer waved to Joe from over his portable and told him he'd looked pretty good.

Then big Ran Bland, tourney favorite, came down the aisle, exuding his usual tolerant arrogance. He was built like a gridiron halfback, one of the fast breakaway type, deep-chested, slim-hipped. And handsome in the bargain in a lazy-eyed way.

"Tsk, tsk, Palme. you're slipping, I guess," he drawled, patently letting his gaze drift over the worn spots on the front edge of Long Joe's coat. "Took four sets to whip a man who was up all night with an attack of his

ulcers! No, not good, pally. Poor Judge wasn't sure he could play this morning even... Tsk, tsk... Hi, Charley." Bland turned his back on Joe Palme. Randall Bland was a free-wheeling expert at being rude.

Long Joe paled around the mouth a little, then forced a grin as he moved on and out back toward the headquarters of the smart wealthy Atlantic Coast Club. Now all the exultation was gone. Before, he'd felt good about the way he'd won, about moving into the third round of this, one of the outstanding tournament fixtures of the East. But now Ran Bland had robbed him of all that. Bland had a knack of being able to needle the usually carefree Joe Palme that way. Maybe it was because Joe himself hated the man. While Bland, who'd whipped him every time last season and, with one exception, during the Southern winter season, when they'd crossed rackets—Bland treated Long Joe with an easy scorn.

"I got to take him," Long Joe muttered. He had to, because he realized Bland was fast getting the old Indian sign on him.

AFTER a shower and a rubdown, he dressed and went upstairs to the club lounge. In a black humor. He hadn't known about Judge's ulcer attack. And he'd rather had had the information from anybody save Randall Bland. Then he saw Marcia Tessard over there with some friends, beckoning to him from a corner booth. She was Lou Tessard's niece, a willowy brunette, not beautiful but terribly chic and clever with a certain classic attractiveness. She was one of the tournament crowd herself, a fair player with an imperturbable calm. She was out of action at the present time, still recovering from a twisted ankle.

The easy-going effervescent Long Joe was back in a good humor almost at once, smiling around at the party with her. He took her long hand that she extended to congratulate him.

"Joe, you really looked pretty wonderful out there," she said in the slightly high somewhat affected

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C R A C K **DETECTIVE** S T O R I E S

PRESENTS



A Brand New
"Jigger Moran" Novel
by the author of
"There Are Dead Men
in Manhattan"

Moist eyes searched Jigger Moran's face then Professor Scott nodded slowly. Jigger resumed, "Sally Woods was an alias assumed by an heiress born Susan Hunter. Her home life was a sordid story of a tyrannical father who perverted her natural development, plotted to steal a fortune bequeathed by her grandmother, and manipulated her into marriage with a pathological cousin. From all that she sought to escape. That's why she took up as Sally Woods here in New York."

Scott was listening raptly, believably. He said, "It explains a great portion of her writing for me. There have been clear allusions to just such conditions as you have described. A father is strongly hinted, over and over again."

Jigger said, "Good! I was hoping to wring some clues something of real help, from those writings. With his daughter gone, Matthew Hunter, the father, circulated news of her death, carrying the hoax even to prima facie certification and burial procedure. Undoubtedly, he sought to find her and kill her—whenever and wherever he could."

"The girl was deathly afraid to return home, afraid to assume her identity. I know that she was in telephone communication with her father not long before she was killed, and I also know the father knew where she was living, under the name of Anne Brown."

Scott said clearly, "That fits in with another exercise of hers—at last. It was a conflict of decision and fear."

Scott said clearly, "That fits in with our first time together and I remembered it when the girl's aunt spoke of a recent phone call. The girl undoubtedly wanted to go home, wanted to expose the cruel hoax; she probably found the courage to threaten that she would just before she was murdered."

"Her father, then, murdered her?" There was a shiver in Scott's tones.

DEATH BE MY DESTINY

by John Roeburt

*It will appear complete in our January, 1949, issue
on sale at all stands November 1st*

(Continued From Page 82)

voice that sometimes irked him. He used to speculate on whether she'd talk naturally if she were emotionally excited about something. "I kept a placement and errors record on you, Joe. You erred fifteen percent less than you did at Jackson Heights tourney."

Joe frowned slightly. The steward was over for his order. Joe hesitated, then said to make it a coke. He didn't go for highballs as a matter of training, didn't care for the cocktails and long mixed drinks Marcia's crowd went in for. Actually, when he was thirsty as now after sweating on the court, he liked beer. But Marcia had told him that was common, that it simply wasn't drunk in these circles. Somebody told him Bland had simply raced through his opponent that afternoon on the big grandstand court, had only allowed him a total of five games in three sets.

"He's got such terrific power on his ground strokes," said a pert-faced blonde girl in the party, eyes a little dreamy. "And he seems to do everything so easily."

Marcia checked her wrist watch. "Time we were going, Joe. The pro'll be waiting. Bye bye, sweets... Call me tonight, Eve."

* * *

Driving the forty odd miles up into the hills in one of Lou Tessard's big convertibles with Marcia at the wheel, Long Joe told himself he was a lucky guy. Tessard, a wealthy investment broker—a millionaire, actually—had taken him under his wing. Though never an outstanding player and in his late fifties now, Lou Tessard was crazy about tennis. And he expressed his love for the game by doing everything he could to develop young outstanding comers of the court. Supported them, if necessary. Had them tutored by one of the outstanding professional instructors whom he'd brought in from the West Coast. Gave them every aid and encouragement even to financing their tournament campaigns if necessary. And there were no strings at-

tached. He simply loved the game as a pure sportsman, had brought along two stars who'd become Davis Cup team members. Lou Tessard was one swell guy. Right, all the way through.

Joe rocked in the seat as they took a curve at high speed. His eyes darted to the speedometer. Better than sixty five. He looked at Marcia's clean-cut determined profile.

"We've got to make time," she said serenely as she tooled the high-powered job along expertly. "I just remembered my watch was six minutes slow." She whipped around another car.

Joe cooked an eyebrow, watching her. She had a way of doing everything so damned efficiently he sometimes wondered if she had blood in her veins. Yet, he knew she liked him quite a lot. And a marriage with Marcia Tessard, who was wealthy in her own right, could just about make a man inasmuch as she was Lou Tessard's niece.

"Incidentally, Joe, you've got to watch that cursing during a match. I know it's you yourself who you're calling names. But when you netted that backhand in the fourth game of the first set, we could hear what you said in the marquee."

"Yeah, yeah," Joe said, pulling at that disreputable floppy-brimmed felt hat he wore winter and summer. He could feel her eyes surveying it disapprovingly when they pulled up on a red blinker at a crossroads.

TWENTY odd minutes later, they were swinging up the private side road to Tessard's sprawling summer country home. A little more than five minutes after that, Joe was walking onto one of Tessard's two private courts in shorts and a tennis shirt again for his workout with Tessard's pro.

"How's the roughneck?" Phil Winters greeted him. "You looked pretty sharp today—outside of a few bad spots where your court strategy slipped badly." Winters was a likeable chap, stocky and bespectacled, A tutor who really knew the game

and knew, too, how to instill the basic elements of it into a pupil. He seemed to tacitly like Long Joe's flamboyance and his instinct to battle for every point though he was altering his style of play. He agreed with Tessard that winning tennis was a matter of court strategy, of not taking risks till the big strike presented it. That the strokes were simply the means to implement said strategy the way a general would use artillery.

They worked out for a full hour, Winters drilling Joe in the forcing precision play that set up the finisher blow. The strategy was not soft patball tennis. But, instead, to keep your own defenses intact, never providing an opening by an all-out attack, till the stage was set.

"Watch that!" Winters would call across the net. "A lob would have been smarter there..." Or. "Don't give the angle like that again. I wasn't in the hole yet. I could've blasted you down either side."

Long Joe wasn't too spent when he came off. After all, he usually competed in the doubles, too, at tournaments. This time, Tassard had advised against it. "You're overdue to take that cup away from Bland, Joe," he'd said.

Dressing for the evening, Long Joe's lips pulled tight, recalling the remark. That damned Ran Bland! Bland with the wealthy father who could underwrite his year-round tennis campaigning with ease and in fancy figures. Bland with his air of superiority, his overwhelming self assurance. And that attitude when he took the court, except against a top-ranking star, of being about to administer an unpleasant lesson.

Long Joe buckled a belt at his slim waist with a savage gesture. There had always been a psychological dislike between them, Bland had repeatedly referred to him as "that roughneck" because of his slam-bang game, his eccentric and often dramatic court behaviour. Because, too, of that what-the-hell attitude. Then there had been that bridge game one

night at the Boca Raton Tournament down in Florida this winter.

The stakes had been advanced till they were much higher than Joe had meant to play for. He was nervous, knowing he couldn't afford to lose. He'd dealt. Play had started. And then, after a few tricks, he'd happened to glance down and see that ace of trumps poking from under the flap of his sports blazer on his lap. The player on his left spotted it at the same instant. It was an accident of course; he'd dropped it when dealing. He himself was short a card. He insisted on conceding the game to the rival team who'd made the bid. And there was no rancor. None of the other three considered for a moment that it had been deliberate cheating.

But Ran Bland had dropped into the card room to kibitz for a few minutes. And he started the ugly whisper on its rounds. That Joe Palme wasn't too ethical about the way he played cards. Joe couldn't pin the guilt on him for launching the slander on its course, had to take it in silence. The story had persisted as they moved northward, up through Pinehurst and White Sulphur. Joe found himself getting the cold shoulder in some quarters. Found people eyeing him with suspicion if he happened to turn around suddenly. It wasn't nice medicine to swallow. Lou Tessard had even queried him about it before taking him under his wing.

So Long Joe had more than just a court score to settle with Ran Bland. It preyed on his mind. He was moody and restless when he and Marcia drove down to the village to catch a movie that night. Lou Tessard seemed confident he had a good chance against Bland. But Long Joe himself felt unsure of himself, ill at ease using that Tessard system of court strategy. It was like using a new unfamiliar racket of a different weight and balance than his own.

Marcia kissed him good night lingeringly, when they were back at the house. "You were splendid on that court today, Joe... And you



*Two Intensely Gripping
Fight Novelets*

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*Lead Off the January
Issue of*

SUPER SPORTS

didn't put on one of your acts once. Good night."

Pacing the terrace afterward under a tawny slice of moon, he had that uncomfortable feeling of being out of place again. Sure, they all liked him when he stayed in line. But, in his secret mind, he'd always sort of gloried in being known as the rough-neck of the court. At least he was himself then....

THE NEXT afternoon he blasted through Hank James of Texas in straight sets. But he didn't preen himself too much on that victory. The Texan had been out of tourney play for some weeks and was still trying to find the touch of his hard-hitting game. He was inclined to streaks of wildness. And that stuff was made to order with Long Joe sticking to the controlled play of the Tessard system.

"You got one tough game to crack through, Joe, with that new style of play," James told him as they came off. "You're right smooth, boy. This might be your chance to knock off Bland. He's in the upper half of the draw, isn't he?"

Long Joe nodded. He himself was in the lower half. They would meet in the final round if both came through. And Ran Bland was a top-heavy favorite to do so. Then Tessard met him and they walked to the clubhouse together. The former had gotten up from the city in time to see the last half of his protege's match. Tessard was a tall thin man, hard as a bone and tanned to a mahogany hue from a winter at his place in Bahama. The long sharp jaw gave him a harsh look. But it was countered by the human twinkle in his bluish eyes.

"I got to be a 'yes, but—' guy today, Joe," he told the player in his deep modulated voice. "You looked very good. But you still got that trick of stepping around backhands to use that running forehand at times. Bad stuff, Joe."

In the second set, when James had pressed him for a brief period, getting impatient, Joe had been guilty

ALL SPORTS

of that court sin. Also at the finish, in a hurry to clean it up as on yesterday, he'd repeated the sin. And scored placements doing it. He mentioned that last, a little tartly.

Tessard dropped a long arm around Joe's shoulders. "Sure. You did. But I'm not planning on today's matches—or on how things work against second raters. I'm thinking about the National Singles at Forest Hills. Against top flight American and foreign competition, Joe. Because that's the kind of stuff you're headed for. You leave the right side of your court wide open when you run around those backhands like that."

"Yeah, I know you're right, Mr. Tessard." But it had felt good, like being unfettered, to pull those running forehand drives. "I—"

The chairman of the club tournament committee intercepted them on the path to the clubhouse. He started to make with the palaver on how the tourney was progressing and the kind of a showing Joe Palme was making. And how the photographers of one of the big picture magazines would be down tomorrow to make special shots relating to the business of staging a tournament. How he would appreciate it if Joe got over in the forenoon to co-operate and—

"Sure, sure," Long Joe cut him off. "See you tomorrow." And he stalked off to the locker quarters brusquely. It was one of those unconscious gestures that had earned him his reputation as a court roughneck. He simply had a lot on his mind and didn't want to listen to the guy's blah. But when Lou Tessard joined him in the dressing room, Joe realized he'd pulled a bloomer. Though a real man and no stuffed shirt, Tessard was very particular about observing the amenities of social conduct. His tone was cold as he discussed further details of the match with the player.

THE NEXT day he advanced into the semi-final round, defeating the little stonewall retriever, Bitsy Parks. But it was only after a pro-

(Continued On Page 38)

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ALL SPORTS

(Continued From Page 87)



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longed five-set battle from which he emerged sweat-soaked. And the clubhouse scales showed him some seven pounds lighter. He had played erratically, upset by the struggle between his attempt to follow the Tessard theory of the game and his natural instincts with a tennis bat.

Lou Tessard told him not to worry about it. That he'd simply sweated one of those bad days, common to every competitor, out of his system. But it didn't help any, when he returned to the marquee after dressing, to watch the end of Ran Bland's match. The favorite won going away in three sets, playing well within himself. Sometimes he cut loose with a drive that fairly smoked.

"Thanks for getting that pesky little Parks out of the picture, Palme," Bland told Joe as he came off. "He can give anybody a few headaches in an afternoon." He winked, smirking sarcastically as he let go the left-handed verbal slap at Long Joe.

Joe gave him back a grin that wasn't humorous. "Look, chum, we know you're great. And your old man's got a fat checkbook. But that won't save you from the headaches I'll give you when we meet—if I have to climb the net and belt you over the head with a racket! See?"

Bland raised eyebrows suavely, chuckled, said, "Our roughneck friend always runs true to form all right." Then he turned his back to answer a reporter's questions. Long Joe felt as if a door had been slammed in his face....

THAT EVENING, Lou Tessard gave his annual dinner, followed by dancing till midnight, at the country club near his summer place for competitors in the Atlantic Coast Club tournament. Long Joe was a little bored. He'd had a short workout with Winters after returning from his afternoon's match. And his stroking had still been unsteady, lacking in authority. He seemed to be in a fog, uncertain when to hit out for the clincher shot. And he'd suddenly realized he didn't care whether or not he did.

He was stale, belly-fed with the

BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE

game. Now, at the dinner, he disliked everybody around him because they represented tennis. Talked of tennis, seeming to think it was the most important thing in the world. The dancing started. He danced once with Marcia, faked a rumba with a plump brunette who was a favorite to cop the women's title at the Atlantic Coast fixture.

"It must be a wonderful break to be taken under Lou Tessard's wing," she said once. "They say that pro of his, Winters, is a wonder. Tessard has made stars out of more than a few players who'd just be trophy-hunting free-loading tournament bums," she rattled on.

Joe felt the color climbing his sun-tanned neck. Was glad somebody cut and he could wander off. He went into the cocktail lounge and ordered a large beer. Down at the end of the leather-fronted bar Ran Bland with a small party were having highballs, the big blond-headed star laughing as he was the center of attention of the group as usual. Bland was calling for refills when the restless Long Joe strayed out.

A warm breeze murmured softly on the night as he had a cigaret on the awninged terrace overlooking the fourth hole of the golf course. He went down the steps and took a walk over the cushiony grass. The dance music drifted after him. The brunette's remark kept coming back to him. Made him wonder if, really, he was anything more than a "free-loading tournament bum." Her words made him feel like an object of charity. It made his skin crawl.

HE WAS approaching the clubhouse on his return when a car came around the looping drive. It's headlights peeled the darkness from the grounds along the side of the terrace. And Long Joe had a glimpse of Ran Bland and Marcia embraced in a long kiss. A flash of anger blazed through him, then was gone. After all, he had no right to interfere. But inside, as he stood in the stag line along the edge of the dance floor a few minutes later, Bland spotted him

(Continued On Page 90)

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ALL SPORTS

(Continued From Page 89)

and gave him a knowing wink. It was obvious the big star had had quite a few drinks.

"Hey, Palme, maybe you aren't so hot on a court. But you sure got some pretty good taste in other ways. You sure got yourself fixed up cute when you moved in on Tessard. Ha-ha! I just did a little sampling and it was all right, my friend, all right. Much too good for you, in fact."

That was too much for Long Joe in his present state of mind. He knew he shouldn't brawl inside the country club. But before he could clear the red fog from his mind he'd cracked Bland across the mouth with his open palm. Bland let out a roar and charged. But others grabbed the pair and hustled them out of the grillroom into the foyer. And then the two of them broke loose, Bland freeing himself first and catching Joe Palme a backhand blow across the chin.

They swapped punches, Joe reaching the mouth but getting rocked by a chop to the jaw. He sailed in, arms windmilling, half crouched, the old gashouse district technique. Bland was driven back, then grappled. They hit the floor together, thrashing around. Though much lighter, Long Joe was as slippery as a snake. Pinned under, he writhed loose, got atop his opponent's chest.

Then they were pried apart and he was hauled off. And there was Marcia standing there, white-faced with anger and scorn. For Joe. She said frigidly, "The roughneck streak will always come out in you, won't it?"....

It was only a short walk along the country road to the Tessard estate. Joe got there, packed a bag with his meager belongings, left a note for his benefactor. He told Tessard thanks for everything but said he'd feel better if he went it alone. He got the chauffeur to drive him down to the Atlantic Coast Club where they fixed him up with a back room in the wing over the kitchen. His thoughts were scrambled when he turned in and lay sleepless. He was

BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE

disgusted with his own actions, he did know. Still....

THE NEXT afternoon he took his semi-final round match in a prolonged five set duel, looking none too good. Sticking to the Tessard system without knowing why, with bad lapses in his timing, he battled it out from the baseline. Finally wore his opponent down through sheer fatigue. And with it 3-all in games in the fifth set, the mentally harassed Long Joe reverted to his slam bang tactics and ran out the match. It would be he and Rand in the finals. And Bland had looked terrific that afternoon.

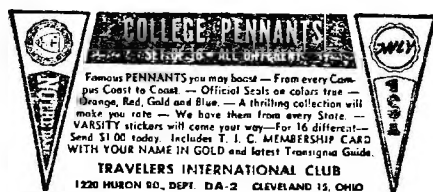
Long Joe spent a bad night, staying away from the rest of the tennis crowd before turning in. It seemed now that he'd ruined his hopes of tennis success by walking out on Tessard. He felt all tangled up inside, inside, baffled, as though his very personality was split and he was two different people inside his own skin. A little after dawn, he woke, hot-eyed and sweating with tension. Then, standing at the open window, listening to the clatter coming from the club kitchen, he arrived at a sudden decision.

He'd tried to do things the other way, The Tessard system and the restrained conduct on the court. Tried to be the "nice" guy. It hadn't worked too well, building up that inside conflict. He was going to revert. Going to be the old Long Joe and let them call him roughneck if he wanted. He was going to shoot his former slam bang take-a-chance tennis against Bland.

Almost immediately he felt a lot better. The tension began to drain from his body. And the picture looked even more promising when Harry James, the Texan he'd defeated earlier, came over to his table. James and his partner were in the final of the doubles so he was still around. He had news.

"Bland was in a little auto smash-up last evening, Joe," James told him confidentially. "He's keeping it

(Continued On Page 92)



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ALL SPORTS

(Continued From Page 91)

hushed up. But he banged up a knee pretty bad. Had a local doctor fix it up."

"Yeah?"

"Uh huh. Saw him testing it on one of the back courts a little while ago. Joe, you can take him. He likes to rush that net. Keep bringing him in, then lob to chase him back. That knee will cave and then he'll be your meat. Easy. Just lob and make him keep tearing back and turning on it in a hurry."

Long Joe exhaled cigaret smoke and grinned through it. This looked like his day, all right. . . .

BECAUSE HE stuck to the old-fashioned style and wore full length tennis flannels, the tape and bandaging around Ran Bland's knee did not show when he took the grandstand court against Joe that afternoon. Bland was his usual imperious self on a court, stroking almost negligently but with piercing power. Before the packed stands, they spun rackets. Bland won and elected to let Joe open with service. That would give Bland the delivery in what might be a crucial even game in a set.

"Let's make this fast, fella," Bland said before they moved to positions. "I got a date afterward. Marcia."

Long Joe reddened a little, then got a grip on himself and gave a wide grin. He knew the remark had been made to needle him.

"Ready—play," called the umpire under his sun parasol.

Long Joe arched his slim body up and back and whacked one of his hard-twisting smoking serves into court. They swapped drives, Bland applying that sure even power of his at once. Joe pulled a short cross court, pulling Bland in. Bland came onto the net. Joe promptly lobbed to the baseline. Bland went back for it but was none too fast, turning slowly and failing to get a smash shot at the ball. Joe finally took the point, served again, chopped to bring Bland in. Lobbed. Bland did get back and smash it, but broke stride with a

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ALL SPORTS

(Continued From Page 95)

he actually drove Bland's racket out of his hand. And at 7-6 in games he broke through Bland's service to cop the set, the third set.

But there wasn't too much satisfaction in it. One set to two as they went off to the clubhouse for the rest period. And Joe knew Bland had let that set go once he got behind, figuring on the exhaustion due in the fourth and fifth, if there was a fifth. In other words, he, Long Joe Palme, had to win that fourth to stay in the running.

And Bland broke through Long Joe's service when they returned to the court and opened that fourth set. Bland hitting with bullet-like force and sharpshooter precision was too much. Long Joe was tempted to use his former tactics to weaken that bad knee. But he fought off the itch even as Bland held his own delivery to go into a 2-0 lead. His legs had begun to grow heavy. But Joe took his own service to make it 2-1 in games.

But Bland was strong and confident. He held his service, despite Joe's all-out hitting, to jump into a commanding 3-1 lead. Joe had his first doubts. Maybe he should have stuck to the Tessard system.

Then a ball boy walked over to him with a note that had been sent out from the marquee. Joe opened it mechanically, read it. It said, "Play your own game, boy. And the best of luck." There was no signature.

IT STIFFENED him. Win or lose, he was going to be himself all the way. And he wasn't going to take advantage of Bland's knee. The latter, he'd already noticed, seemed to have no trouble with it when covering his baseline. Forcing himself to forget his fatigue, Long Joe began to batter his service in there. He held it to make it 3-2 in games against him. Then he set out to break through Bland.

But Bland held for a 4-2 lead in a protracted game. Joe lashed away and copped his own service. 4-3. Then Bland double faulted to open his own delivery in the eighth game. And Joe roared into the breach. Bland

BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE

quick grimace of pain an instant later. He was favoring that leg, Joe saw. It was hurt all right. Joe Palme tongued his lips with satisfaction. He'd get back at this old foe today all right.

He aced him to go into a 30-15 lead, brought him in short on the next point, lobbed. Then he cruised up to half volley Bland's return, short into the forecourt again. Bland started heavily, then pulled up, conceding the point. Long Joe ripped off an ace to annex the game.

BLAND TURNED on his service, a powerful weapon carrying heavy pace. Joe Palme dropped the game to make it 1-all, but ran Bland back and forth, from backline to net and back again, plenty. Joe took his own second service, continuing the tactics designed to break down that knee. Bland studied him across the net thoughtfully, then swerved. And Long Joe amazed the gallery by breaking through him as Bland fell once in twisting after legging it back under a lob. Then refused to go back after the next one.

"Games, 3-1, Mr. Palme leading," announced the umpire.

"And the big stinker'll probably come up with his alibi after the licking," Joe told himself as he took balls for service from the ball boy. "He'll show the knee to reporters and pose as a game though beaten hero. He'll—" And then that thread of thought broke off abruptly.

For Long Joe was suddenly wondering if he wanted to win that way. He wanted to humble Bland, his nemesis, wanted it like nothing in the world. But—did he want it this way, by taking advantage of a man accidentally crippled?

The answer wasn't long in coming as he toed the backline in service position. No! No matter how much he hated the man, any man. He wanted to whip him when he was right, at his best. Long Joe sucked air, let it out slowly through tight nostrils. He knew what he had to do. It could mean defeat, probably

(Continued On Page 94)

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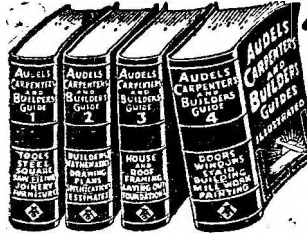
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ALL SPORTS

(Continued From Page 93)

would. It would mean discarding a certain means to victory. But it was the way it had to be.

He served, a slashing delivery. Bland blocked it back stiffly to the backhand corner and moved netward, figuring there'd be another of those short shots. But Long Joe lashed it down the sideline off his backhand. It was out. He took the next point, swapping baseline drives with big powerful Bland till the latter netted off a daring gambling shot of Joe's. There was no more drawing Bland on, then running him back. Joe was no net rusher himself, instead a slugging battler from the baseline. And he went wide open, shooting in his old slam bang take-a-chance style.

A thin smile hovered around Bland's mouth. He eased off on his hitting a notch, waiting for the gambling Joe to err. Joe did. And then he dropped the game on a double fault for the final point. Bland, shooting with those booming precision drives of his, held service to even the score. He got a rousing hand from the gallery.

Long Joe proceeded to lash out, to take every chance. He ran off his own service game at love, driving for the corners, for the lines, pressing every instant, refusing to go on the defensive. But Bland knotted it up again behind his delivery. Joe took the first two points with his free-style hitting, then erred twice. Bland, in the next exchange, with his beautiful flat drives zipping into Joe's court like rockets, punched one deep into the backhand corner. Joe was on it but held his racket back, figuring it was due to go out. The linesman failed to call it bad.

"Holy sweet Pete!" Long Joe ranted, his voice audible to the stands. He tacked on some fancy names, slapped his racket to the clay, stared imploringly at the sky. He nodded at the linesman to say he knew the man was right on the call. But the stands missed that. Failed to understand that he was berating himself. They booed and some seat cushions were tossed toward the court. To them, this was the old roughneck in action. Joe

BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE

gaped with surprise when the first cushion plunked onto the court.

Bland took the game, then broke through Joe's service as the latter, riled, tried for aces and double faulted twice. Leading at 5-4, Bland, serving, held off Long Joe's savage attack to go to deuce. Got 'vantage in. He worked in, half volleyed a cross court cutter with plenty of backspin so it bounced low, skidding. Joe couldn't quite get his racket on it. And then the linesman called, "Out!"

It was a mistake. Long Joe knew it was in. And he reverted to type, giving the derelict arbiter a savage stare. Then he deliberately threw the next point to Bland to square it up, driving far out over Bland's baseline. Bland stared a moment, then whipped over a surprise ace on Joe, using a reverse twist service. It was the game and the set.

Joe felt his nerve slipping. It looked like the old story. Ran Bland moving inexorably toward victory. Joe thought of that bad knee of Bland's, how he could work on it. Then he shook his head as he prepared to serve. Something in him wouldn't let him try to win that way....

THAT SECOND set was a whizz-bang. Games went with service to four-all with both men making shots that had the gallery in a dither, out of their seats half the time. Long Joe was shooting all-out. And never before had he appreciated the game that Bland possessed. The big guy had a terrific sense of anticipation. And even when you forced him, he seldom sent back a weak shot. He might play it safe. But he was always firing for position play.

Long Joe went all out. But his control wavered then. He dropped his service in a close game. And then Bland crashed through to take the set. It looked as if it were all over. Bland was smirking confidently.

But Long Joe tore into him in that third crucial set. He went for the angle, punched at the corners, then began running around shots, when he'd forced Bland, to get off that running forehand drive. Once, with it,

(Continued On Page 96)

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BULLDOG ON THE BASELINE

stroked Joe's return to Joe's backhand corner. Joe loped into the shot, racket back. And he rifled it in the gambling shot, straight down that sideline. Even a player of Bland's calibre couldn't dig up that shot. Forcing, going for the point on every shot, long lithe body whipping behind every stroke, Joe went on to break through him and square up the set at 4-all.

Long Joe served. At 30-15, Bland got off a sliced shot to the backhand corner. Joe netted, forgetting to hit deep enough under the ball that carried backspin. He put on an act, waving his arms, stomping. Then, in his eagerness to regain the point with an ace, he swerved out, tried to bang in the second ball.

"Fault!" cried the linesman. "Foot fault!" Meaning Joe's left foot had crossed the backline before he'd hit the ball on service.

Long Joe flung down his racket, beat his head, looked imploringly at the heavens. "You dope!" he cried "You big dope, Joe Palme! You jackass!" And that time the crowd chuckled as they realized he was berating himself.

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ROOKIE COACH

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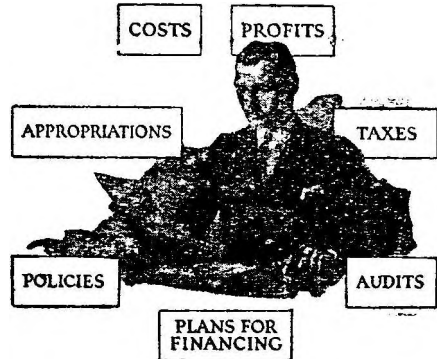
a condition Pop forgot to mention."

"Oh yes," Pop went on, "I've been led to believe by a certain party that a head coach should be a married man. More dignified and all that, you know. Think you might be able to qualify young man?"

Johnny reached out and took Ann into his arms. "It sounds good to me," he said, "how about you Ann?"

Ann wrinkled up her brow in deep study, and then looked up and smiled sweetly. "Well, I guess I'm hooked," she said, "after all I am the certain party Pop mentioned a minute ago.

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(Continued From Page 97)

Having the gallery with him for once heartened him. He reeled off two successive service aces, then ran around a Bland shot to the backhand to reel off one of those crushing running forehand drives for the game. And he came on a-rush; hammering, giving all he had, but stroking loosely, without tension, as he never had when playing the Tessard system, to break through Bland for the set.

It was two sets all, an even up match now. But Long Joe was leaking sweat, bled white with fatigue. Against that forceful stroking of Ran Bland's, a man could never let up. Serving again. An exchange of baseline drives. A sliced shot by Bland that hit in the forehand corner and curved on the bounce to the outside. Long Joe lunged, left his feet, chopped sharply, a ball that just dropped over the net for the point. And then, Joe, unable to stop himself, went catapulting on toward the baseline official.

The latter jumped clear of his chair. Joe, travelling at top speed, off balance, released his racket and tried to throw himself over the vacant chair. He cleared it, all but his right foot. That smacked the back of the chair sharply. Pain bit through the foot. When he got up, he limped around on it. Removed his shoe and sat down to massage it. But when he resumed play, it was plain to everybody he was half limping, badly handicapped.

HE MANAGED to hold his game by means of blistering serves that forced defensive returns from Bland. Then Bland served. His delivery wasn't as stiff now. The blond-headed giant was feeling the pace too. And then he showed his true colors. He chopped short to make Joe come in on his aching foot, then lobbed deep to force him to hobble back on it. Did it again. Suddenly boos from the crowd. They were broken a moment by cheers for Joe as, face twisted with the pain of running, he got back in time to smash one of those lobs for the point. Then

the boos again for Bland's tactics.

Long Joe, panting, standing on his left foot, grinned. It came to him. Bland's unsportsmanlike tactics had shown him. He could have used such tactics all the way against Bland to take advantage of his injured knee. Had discarded them. This showed him that, down deep, he was a better man than Ran Bland. For the first time, he knew it. And it gave him a surge of confidence such as he had never known before.

Locking his mind against the pain of that foot, he began to stroke with a new daring, a cold calm sureness that had never been his before. He lashed that ball for the lines, to the corners, taking it low, on the rise, getting unbelievable whiplike power behind his racket. He broke through big Bland. Then he crashed on to annex the set at 6-3. And match! The Atlantic Coast Club title!

He stood swaying with fatigue on the baseline after his final placement, scarcely able to believe it. Then he remembered he should shake hands with Bland. But the latter, face sullen and dark with anger, was running off the court, toward the marquee, ignoring the amenities of the game. And he was going off to a barrage of boos and catcalls. Long Joe pulled his worn Camel coat over his shoulders. Blushed sheepishly as he accepted the trophy cup from the club chairman and posed for the newsreel cameras.

Then he saw Lou Tessard advancing toward him and got a queasy feeling in his innards. But the millionaire sportsman was grinning and put out his hand. "You were great, Joe," he said heartily. "I was all wrong. You're the kind of a guy who's got to play his own game. Congratulations!"

Long Joe felt really good then, all right all the way through. And over Tessard's shoulder, he saw a blue-eyed blonde babe in the marquee who was looking at him with a cute smile. Long Joe winked. He had come of age as a tennis player, and as a man at last....

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