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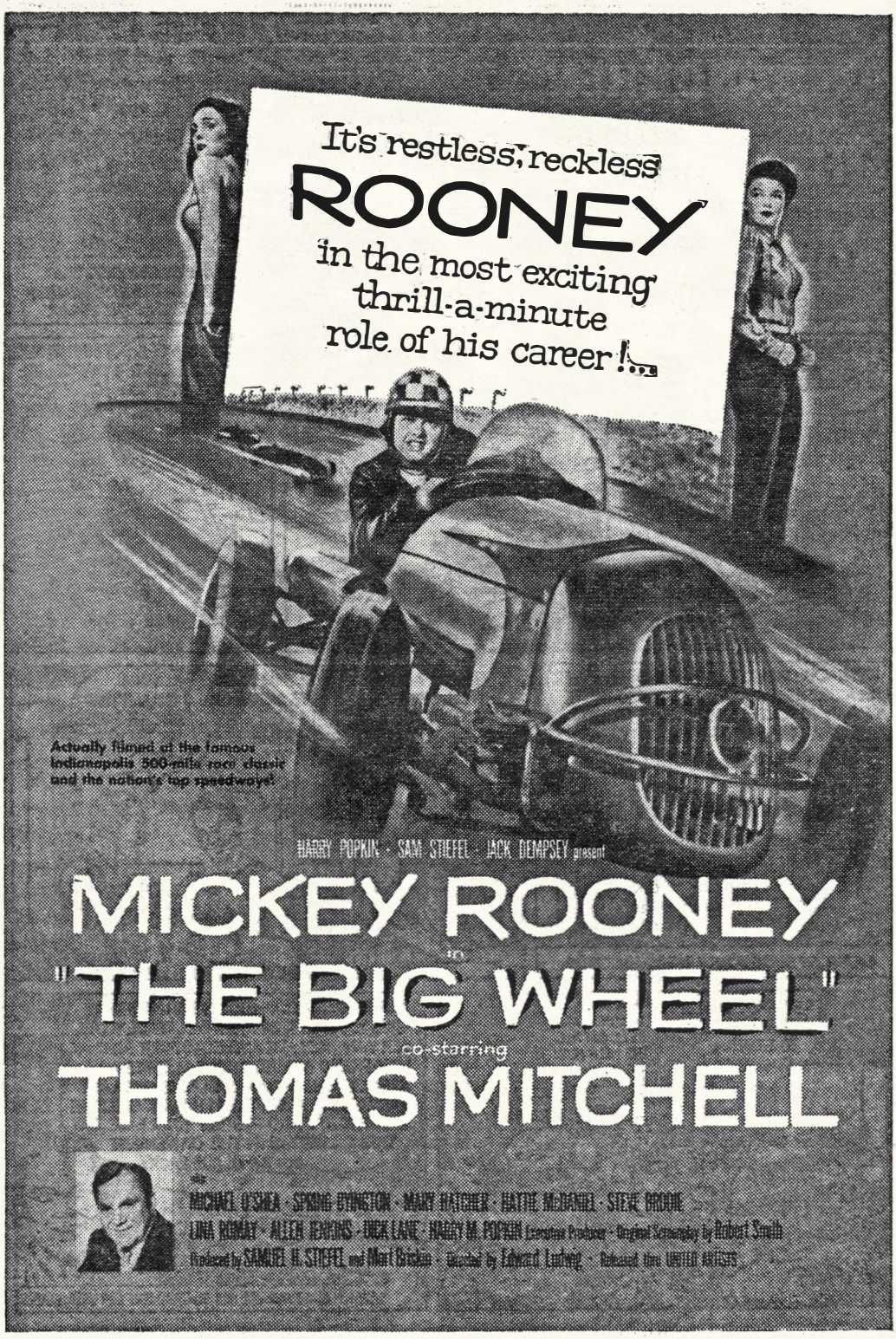
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(Continued on page 126)

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BUSTAWAY FIVE

The four hardwood outcasts and the score-a-million kid had just one more thing to share—a down-court dynamite dream that could make—or break the—

RIDING through the campus in his sporty maroon roadster, bright with chrome trim, Jay Blaisdell could tell what kind of school this was. The cars along the curb were old, dilapidated junk heaps. There were even two or three light farm trucks.

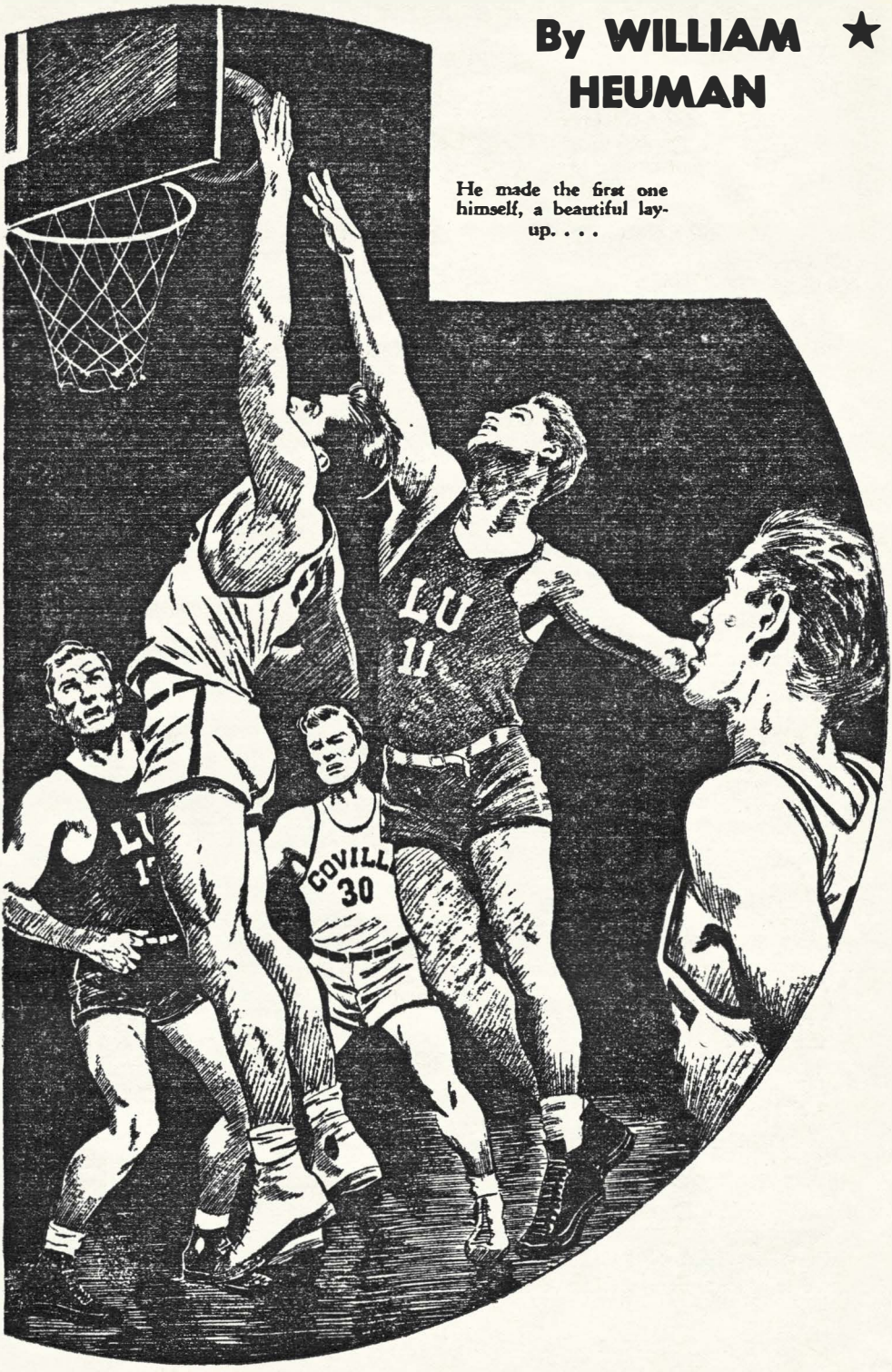
This was a poor man's school, a hick college, just as he'd expected. Rolling up in front of the administration building, a two-story red brick structure which looked like a firehouse, Jay shut off the motor and sat there for a few moments, bitterness raging in his heart.

He told himself that he wouldn't go in, wouldn't register. He could turn pro.

The others shouted, "Hit it—hit it!"

By WILLIAM HEUMAN ★

He made the first one himself, a beautiful lay-up. . . .



Several of the big-time basketball coaches had watched him play at State, and they'd made favorable comments even though he'd been a sophomore with two full years to go.

He could put himself on the block and go to the highest bidder. He could sell the roadster, a Christmas present from his father. He could keep going with the proceeds from that until he got on his feet.

Then he knew that he couldn't do it. His mother wouldn't be able to take that. After the recent heart attack they'd kind of kept things from her. His father hadn't told her of the scandal at State when he'd gone on a bender with a wild gang, and had been unable to play basketball the next day. The State coach had intended to drop him from the squad. There had been other incidents, not so pleasant.

The State coach had called up his father, and they'd hushed up the incident. Arrangements had been made for the transfer to Coville, but Jay Blaisdell had not known how small Coville was.

He sat in the roadster, staring distastefully at the red brick building. They had a basketball team here, his father had said. He could picture what kind of a team—farmers, hicks, plodders, meat for any good high-school team's second string.

Jay got out of the car and stood there for a moment, looking toward the entrance-way. A tow-headed boy in a faded brown sweater swung past, grinned at him, and lifted a hand.

Jay nodded distantly. He was thinking as he went up the steps, *I'll score a million points in this kind of competition. I'll break all records.* The thought gave him little consolation.

HE HAD the usual talk with the dean, a seedy little man with watery blue eyes behind his glasses. The dean was nice enough, wishing him a pleasant semester, telling him a little about the school. Financially, he said apologetically, they were not too well off, but they hoped to make certain renovations and add a few more buildings. The dormitories were not in too good a shape. The football field needed to be resodded and enlarged. Jay didn't ask him about the gym and the basketball court. He knew what it would be like—small, dingy, poorly-illuminated and ventilated, the floor boards uneven so that you lost the ball on a dribble. He hoped they weren't still using peach baskets!

"You can talk to the registrar in the next room," the dean said. "Miss Wicks will assign you to your room in the dormitory."

Jay went out into the corridor again, and walked toward another cubby-hole of an office with a sign reading "Registrar's Office." He pictured Miss Wicks—an old dreadnaught who'd been here longer than the school, an institution at Coville, hawk-nosed, gimlet-eyed.

He went in, and Miss Wicks said, "Good afternoon."

She was about twenty or twenty-one. She had honey-colored hair and very nice blue eyes. Her nose was short and lightly freckled. She was smiling and her teeth were beautiful. Jay felt a little better. He said meditatively, "Are you really Miss Wicks, or is this a mirage?"

The girl grinned. She said, "I'm Miss Wicks. My uncle is the dean and he has excellent hearing. He is undoubtedly listening to you through the walls. Now, what's your name?"

"Blaisdell," Jay said. "Jay, P."

She was fingering through some cards on the desk, and she said without looking up, "What does the P. stand for?"

Jay reddened a little. He frowned and said, "Praiseworthy."

She had him labeled then—the wealthy New England families, very old, very well-established, the money-class who ruled Boston. There was a twinkle in her eyes as she said, "May I call you Praise for short?"

"What about that room?" Jay growled.

"One-oh-two," Miss Wicks said. "You room with Ed Prentiss. He's a nice—"

"No single rooms?" Jay asked her.

Miss Wicks looked at him thoughtfully. "I thought you'd like to be in with one of the other boys," she said. "They all want to room together."

"If you have any singles," Jay said, "I'd prefer it." He didn't want to be stuck with one of these hicks who snored like a locomotive all night and talked about crops all day.

"We do have a little room on the second floor of Benton Hall," Miss Wicks said. "If you'd prefer—"

"I'd prefer it," Jay said shortly. He was becoming a little exasperated with this girl.

He watched her write it down on a card and she handed it to him. "Two-oh-six," she said. "If you have any complaints see me."

"My pleasure," Jay nodded curtly.

It was about four thirty in the afternoon now, and he supposed the Coville basketball team would be practicing at this hour. He might as well take a look at it. He said, "Which way is the gym?"

"Tropical Hall in town," Miss Wicks told him.

Jay didn't get it. "Tropical Hall?"

"The school gym burned down two years ago," Miss Wicks informed him. "The basketball team has been practicing and playing its games in Tropical Hall in town. Tropical Hall is a dance hall. The town basketball team plays there, and Matty Grogan, who runs the team, also coaches Coville."

Jay felt a little sick. This was getting worse all the time. The school did not even have a gym, and the Coville coach was a five-and-ten cent pro who owned a hick town professional outfit. Matty Grogan!

"Do you play basketball?" Miss Wicks asked him.

"I don't know," Jay said wearily. He didn't even know now whether he'd bother to go out for the team. He said, "I might take a run down. Are they practicing now?"

Miss Wicks nodded. Her eyes were a trifle harder now. She said ironically, "They'll be glad to see you, Mr. Blaisdell, *if* you're a basketball player."

Frowning, Jay went out and got into the car. When he looked up at the building, backing away from the line of old cars, he saw her standing by the window, watching him. Then she stepped away.

HE RODE into town a mile or so away. He located the dance hall on a side street and parked across the way from it.

The side door was open and he went inside. He heard a whistle, and the short, sharp cries of players as they chased up and down the court. He had to go up a short flight of stairs and he came into the dance hall, a long rectangular room, not high, and not wide enough for a regulation basketball court.

The backboards were a dirty white, detachable. The cords were missing from one of the baskets. There were tables around the outside of the court, and a bar at one end. Jay smelled the stale beer and wrinkled his nose distastefully.

They were having a scrimmage out on the floor, and a half-dozen other players sat on chairs along the sidelines, watching. A tall red-haired man in dilapidated white ducks and undershirt was refereeing, moving up and down the court with the players, blowing his whistle.

This was the Coville quintet, and Jay Blaisdell thought bitterly of the beautiful State g y m n a s i u m—cork floors—big, roomy, airy, tile locker rooms—half a hundred men trying out for the squad....

He stood there, and as the red-haired man raced past him he was thinking, *That'll be Grogan—the local pro.* The

redhead grinned at him and lifted a hand in greeting. He was a man of about thirty-two or three, big, bony, with pale blue eyes.

Jay didn't know whether to turn around and go downstairs, or stay and watch. He had nothing to do, he thought; and he didn't want to go back to the room at the dormitory. He sat down on one of the chairs.

The play was fair. He had to admit they were much better than he'd expected. They were not too big, but they moved the ball very fast.

Jay noticed that he was the only spectator. He supposed that the student body had to go home to the farm in a body to do chores when school hours were over.

Grogan blew the whistle after a while to give them a breathing spell, and then came over to where Jay was sitting. He said:

"How's it, kid?"

Jay looked at him. He said, "I'm all right."

"A new student?" Grogan asked him. "You play basketball, kid?" He didn't seem a bit abashed.

Jay moistened his lips. He didn't like this "kid" business. He said, "I play a little."

Grogan studied him thoughtfully. He said, "We could use guys with a little height on this club."

Jay had noticed that only two of the Coville players topped six feet. He was six-one, himself, and that had been considered average at State.

"You want to get into a uniform?" Grogan grinned. "Why not give it a try, kid?"

Jay did want to get on the floor. He hadn't had a basketball in his hands in nearly two weeks now, since the ugly business at State. He could show these farmers a thing or two. He said, "All right. I need a workout."

Some of the Coville players were watching as he walked with Grogan to a door near the check room. He came back in five minutes, wearing a green and white Coville uniform. The uniforms were cheap, moth-eaten. The room in which he'd changed his clothes was unheated.

The scrubs, who'd been watching the scrimmage, were out on the floor, tossing baskets, taking follow-up shots, while the regulars rested on the sidelines. Jay joined these half-dozen misfits. He flipped the first shot through the hoop, cutting the cords beautifully. It was from outside, and he came down after the ball, running with an easy grace, taking a pass from one of the Coville men, flipping it in with his left hand, a push-up shot.

The Coville players on the sidelines watched him. Matty Grogan grinned, took a shot himself, and then whipped the ball to Jay who was cutting in for the rim.

Jay took the hard pass, his hands perfectly relaxed. He switched the ball from his left to his right hand, whirled, and went up in a kind of half-spin, twisting the ball up behind him. It dropped through the net.

One of the scrub players whistled admiringly. Grogan said, "Nice shot, kid." He walked over to Jay and he said, "You just come to the school?"

"I transferred," Jay said. He didn't say from where, and he didn't offer any more information.

"Sure glad to have you," Grogan told him. "I'd like to put you in the next scrimmage we have here. You want to go in?"

"Okay," Jay said briefly. He wondered what some of the State players would say if they saw him now—in this uniform, playing on a court like this. It was laughable.

He was on the second team when Grogan threw the ball up to start the practice scrimmage. A rather short, plump boy was guarding him. The boy nodded and said, "My name's Prentiss. Ed Prentiss."

Jay remembered the name — the guy Miss Wicks had tried to palm off on him. He said, "How are you, Blaisdell?"

He ran away from Prentiss then. He cut in and he cut out. He feinted a few times, and he left Prentiss gasping, struggling to keep up with him. One of the seconds passed the ball to him as he cut down the center lane to the basket. He went up high, the ball resting in the palm of his right hand. When he shot he pushed it off the fingertips, where the control came from. It was good.

Ed Prentiss gasped, "Hey—take it easy, Blaisdell."

They were moving again. The varsity had the ball, coming upcourt. Jay moved with Prentiss, playing man-to-man. He kept his eyes on the ball, watching it as the regulars passed up across the ten-second line.

They tried to work a screen on him, but he contemptuously slid around the stationary block man and kept with Prentiss every moment. Then there was a shot at the board, and Jay moved back. He went high into the air, taking the ball off the boards. When he came down, he feinted Prentiss out of position and dribbled around him.

He went up the court very fast, dribbling smoothly, dextrously. He'd been proud of his dribbling at State. He passed to a Coville man, got the ball back as he drove in toward the basket, and then looped another shot for the rim. This one was on the wild side, but it cut the cords beautifully.

Grogan said, "Like a pro."

They went at it again, and Jay increased the pace as he warmed up. Prentiss was not exactly slow for a boy carrying his weight, but he couldn't keep up with Jay. Within a matter of minutes Jay rang up two more goals. He was hot.

Grogan stopped them after a while and said, "You mind playin' on the other side, Blaisdell?"

Jay was tempted to say, *One side is like the other.* He nodded and made the transfer. A tall, thin boy with lank blond hair went out of the game. Ed Prentiss said with a sigh of relief, "Glad you're on our side now, Blaisdell."

HE WAS with the varsity already, and he made them look good. He kept the ball moving. He was on top of it every moment, taking it off the boards, breaking in on passes, setting up plays under the basket. He was always inclined to dribble a little too much and hog the ball, but when he set it in motion he kept it going.

The varsity increased the pace. They racked up five field goals in a row, Jay scoring twice, and he saw the broad grin on Matty Grogan's face. The pro said, "You're gonna help us, kid. You sign up an' everything at the school?"

"I registered," Jay said. They had time called again, and the practice session was about over. He stood at the foul line, getting off some free throws. He liked doing this. At State once during practice, he'd dropped in twenty-six in a row for a record at the school.

He hit the net six times in a row, and the other players, standing on the sidelines, talking, ready to leave the court, stopped to watch him. Prentiss was recovering the ball under the net, and the fat boy was grinning broadly. He'd taken a kind of personal interest in Jay because he'd had to guard him in the beginning of the game. He called over to the others, "Hey—watch this."

Jay made eight, nine, ten in a row. Grogan was watching now, too, wiping his face with a towel, the ever-present grin on his face. Jay added five more, every one of them striking the cords cleanly.

He nearly missed the nineteenth, but he kept going up to twenty-five. The other players had come over to watch now. On the twenty-sixth shot he missed, the ball

striking the rim, bounding out and away.

Ed Prentiss said, "What do you think of that?"

The other men were impressed. One of them, a stocky redhead by the name of Flynn, said admiringly, "You must have thrown up an awful lot of them, Blaisdell."

"Not too many," Jay murmured.

Another player was saying, "Try it, Matty."

Matty Grogan reddened a little, and he waved his hand in embarrassment. He said, "Hell with it, kid."

"Go ahead, Matty," another boy called.

Jay glanced at the tall coach, and there was a challenge in his eyes. He smiled, but he didn't say anything. He could see that Grogan was honestly a little embarrassed, not wanting to show off, but they were egging him on now, pushing him laughingly toward the foul line.

Grogan nearly missed his second one. The ball rolled around on the rim, but finally dropped through the cords. The big redhead laughed uproariously. He said, "Hell, I can't make two in a row any more."

He dropped in eighteen straight, and Jay Blaisdell watched him, eyes widening. The ball floated up like a feather, falling through without touching the rim. Grogan clowned around, even leaving his set position once in a while, which was very foolish, but he continued to drop the ball through the net. He reached twenty-five, the figure Jay had hit, and then he missed the twenty-sixth shot.

He let out a roar of annoyance as the ball bounced off the rim, and he yelled at Jay, "That twenty-six is the jinx number, kid."

Jay nodded, but he knew that Grogan had deliberately missed that last shot, and it was a nice little gesture. In the dressing room later he learned from Ed Prentiss that Grogan had once shot forty-seven straight fouls from the line.

"He's quite a guy," Prentiss chuckled. "Imagine a fellow working like this almost every afternoon for nothing."

Jay said, "You mean the school doesn't pay him?"

"They wanted to," Prentiss explained. "Matty put his foot down. He likes to play. He says working out with our club keeps him in shape. Besides, he knows the school can't afford it."

"He must be well off," Jay said ironically.

Prentiss thought he meant it. He said, "No, that's just the point. Matty drives a truck mornings for the department of sanitation in town."

Jay gulped. "Department of sanitation," he repeated. "Garbage?"

"We don't call them garbage collectors any more," Prentiss grinned. "It's too undignified."

Jay Blaisdell let that sink in. He told himself he'd have to write a letter to his father and tell him about that. J.D. had said once that he wanted his son to have good contacts. He'd made one this afternoon with the town garbage collector. If he played with the Coville five he'd be playing under the inspired leadership of the department of sanitation!

Grogan came over to him when he was finishing dressing. They had no lockers in the room; their clothes were on hooks on the walls. There were a few benches and a couple of showers that trickled lukewarm water. Grogan said, "We play our first game tomorrow night, kid. Can we count on you?"

Jay hesitated, and then nodded. He noticed that Grogan had seen him hesitate, and the garbage collector was wondering about it.

"Our team ain't so hot," Grogan apologized. "This school don't have too many guys to pick from, an' some of the guys who could play have to work in their spare time. We do the best we can."

For the first time Jay felt a little

ashamed of himself. This garbage man was working gratis, glad to give his time and talent. He was apologizing for something he couldn't help, and which actually was no concern of his.

"I'll be glad to play," Jay said, "and I'll do the best I can."

2

Tin-Can Titans

AS HE drove to the campus he passed Prentiss and two of the other regulars walking. They were just leaving town, taking the highway out to the school. Jay drove past them and stopped. He turned his head, waiting until they recognized him. He saw Prentiss's eyes widen at the sight of the expensive car.

"Jump in," Jay said. "I'll take you back." He was thinking that they didn't even have a bus or any kind of transportation to run the players back to the campus after a workout. They had to walk!

The three players squeezed into the car, and Jay opened up and sped down the highway. Prentiss said thoughtfully, "Quite a car, Jay."

Jay smiled and shrugged. He wondered what they would say if they saw his father's yacht in which they'd cruised the Caribbean last summer, or the private plane, or the big touring car, complete with miniature bar and telephone.

Jim McCann, the Coville first-string center, said, "We're sure glad to have you with us, Jay. We looked like a new team this afternoon."

"Thanks," Jay said, and then, for politeness' sake, "You work some pretty nice plays."

"Matty Grogan's," McCann told him. "Matty doped them out."

They hadn't been bad, at that. Grogan had been showing them a few pick-off plays, legal screens, intended to set a man into the clear. They were as good as anything the coaches had come up with at State.

They were proud of Matty Grogan. Jay could see it in the way they talked about him, the way they listened to him when he explained something on the court. It was a nice thing.

Again Jay stopped the roadster in front of the administration building. The three Coville players walked on to their dormitory, and Jay went up the steps. He knocked on the door of the registrar's office and went in to see Miss Wicks again. What was her first name? Ed Prentiss had used it when he mentioned her. Oh yes—Arabella.

The girl said, "You forget something, Mr. Blaisdell?"

"Where do I pick up my mail?"

"In here," Miss Wicks said, and added, "I noticed you came back with some of the basketball players. Are you going out for the team?"

"I'm on the team," Jay said, and the way he said it made her arch her eyebrows.

"I was quite sure you'd make it," Arabella Wicks said wickedly, "but I thought it would take you longer—say another day. You must be a wonder, Mr. Blaisdell."

"All right," Jay snapped, "you can stop feeding me the needle. I get the point."

"And I won't tell Ed Prentiss that you didn't want to room with him," Arabella added primly, "if you're worrying about that."

Jay stared at her. He'd meant to say something about that, but he hadn't quite known how to come around to it. He said stiffly, "I'm not worrying about anything, Miss Wicks. All I want from you is mail."

"All you'll get from me," Arabella said, "is mail."

Jay walked out of the room. He started the car in the semi-darkness outside, and he stepped hard on the gas as he backed out. The motor roared and the gears ground. He saw Arabella Wicks walk to the window and pull her shade down disdainfully.

HIS room in the dorm was very small, very bare. He set his grips down on the floor and stared around. At State he'd been in one of the big fraternities—luxurious quarters, private bath, dining room downstairs. He had a cot in here, a battered desk and a chair, a closet for his clothes, and a chest of drawers.

In other parts of the building he could hear Coville undergraduates talking, laughing. A boy was singing somewhere, a pretty nice tenor voice.

There was a knock on the door behind him and when he opened it Ed Prentiss was standing there. The chubby boy said, "Heard you were in here, Jay. Anything I can do to get you settled?" He looked at the four expensive leather suitcases on the floor, a matched set. He didn't say anything, but his eyes were wide.

"I'm all right," Jay said. "Just starting to unpack." He hesitated, and then he added, "Sit down awhile if you like."

"Kind of lonely rooming by yourself," Prentiss grinned. "I know how it is. I got out here late this fall and everybody else was teamed up."

Jay was over by the dresser, unpacking. He didn't turn around. It was an embarrassing moment, but he let it pass in silence.

Prentiss stayed for a half hour, talking about the school, about the basketball team. They needed a new gymnasium, but naturally it was a matter of finances. The school supported the team as much as it could, but it was often tough going. They had to rent a bus to take them to the out-of-town games, and sometimes they had to dig in their own pockets to pay for the bus.

"It's a good school, though," Prentiss assured him. "You'll like it, Jay."

"I'm sure I will," Jay murmured, and he tried to keep the dryness out of his voice.

They had a home game the next night. Jay drove down in the roadster, and he passed several groups of students walking down the highway to town. Several heavily-loaded jalopies were up ahead of him, honking horns.

The night was cold, crisp, very clear, with a bright moon. Jay spotted Arabella Wicks walking alone on the left side of the road. She was dressed in a leather sport jacket, a dark-green skirt and a small beret. She wore low heeled shoes, and she swung along briskly.

Jay was thinking dismally, *Doesn't even the dean own a car?*

Slowing down, he called to her, "I can give you a lift in, Miss Wicks." He saw the indecision in her face, and he wondered why he'd asked her. This girl didn't mean anything to him. He had plenty more back home, and she hadn't been too friendly.

Arabella Wicks finally crossed the road and walked to the door of the car. Jay pushed it open. He said, "Don't worry, this isn't a date. You don't have to ride back with me tonight if you don't want to."

"You're always jumping at conclusions," Arabella frowned. "How did you get that way?"

"I'm naturally ornery," Jay told her.

They didn't say much on the way down. He parked the car near the dance hall and went in through the side door to the players' entrance. Arabella entered the hall with a few other Coville undergraduates. He'd learned that she was a student at the college, herself, and that she worked in the dean's office on the side.

Most of the Coville players were in the dressing room when Jay entered. Matty Grogan said to him, "All set for the big one, kid?"

"I'm all set," Jay told him. He wanted to dislike this big, uncouth redhead, but he couldn't. Grogan's grin was contagious, and it was genuine. He liked everybody.

THE COVILLE players were a little nervous, anxious to get going. Jay noticed their uniforms again—no sweat pants, no rayon jackets to match. The green and white uniforms were threadbare, cheap to begin with, now the worse for wear.

The five regulars going out on the floor were Prentiss, McCann, the center, Manning and Porter at the guard positions, and himself. Johnny Russell, the lank kid whose place he'd taken, came over to him, a little abashed. He said, "Hope you score a million, Jay."

Jay was surprised. He heard Ed Prentiss's easy chuckle. Prentiss said, "That means you'll be a relief man, Johnny, not a regular."

"I'm not worrying," Russell grinned. "I'll be in there enough."

They went out on the floor. The dance hall was packed; every available space was taken. They were sitting on the window sills, hanging from the rafters. Jay was thinking as he took his first shot at the rim that some smart operator could make a nice piece of money for himself by putting up a nice little arena which could seat the crowds coming out to watch these games.

The Richburg Agricultural School quintet was out on the floor, moving the ball around. They looked pretty good at first glance in comparison with Coville. The Aggies had bright new scarlet and white uniforms, silk sweat pants and jackets to match.

Ed Prentiss said uncertainly, "These guys look pretty good, Jay. You think we have a chance?"

Jay stared at him, taking it almost as a personal insult. He said, "You boob, we'll run away from them."

Prentiss grinned, and he felt much better. Jay drew a tall, long-jawed, black-haired boy, who he was informed by Grogan was the star of the Aggies.

At the tap-off Jay ran away from him. He had the jump on the Aggie star and he took the ball from center whirling away with it, passing to Manning.

Coville kept it moving, up across the ten-second line, in to McCann in the bucket, out again, into the corners. Jay skipped under the basket, came out down the foul lane, and took a bounce pass from Joe Porter.

He feinted right, suddenly whirled to the left; a short dribble, and then the leap toward the basket, a beautiful hook shot which the Aggie star couldn't get near. The ball dropped through the cords for

the first score of the game, and the Coville crowd howled gleefully.

A moment later Jay stole the ball away from an Aggie player, whipped it to Prentiss, and the chubby boy, who was a pretty good shot, pushed it in from up close. They were off to a four-point lead.

McCann scored the next from the bucket, and then Jay went on a scoring spree, hitting the cords four times in succession, two from in close, one from outside, and then another beautiful hook shot with the left hand.

The dazed Aggies called for time. The Coville crowd was going wild. On the bench Matty Grogan was standing up, yelling as loud as any of the others.

Ed Prentiss pounded Jay's back as they stood in a huddle on the floor. He yelled, "You were right, kid."

Jay didn't say anything. He spotted Arabella Wicks sitting on one of the benches just off the floor. She was sitting with two other girls. She looked away when he glanced in her direction.

They went to work again when the whistle blew. The Aggies finally managed to break the ice. They scored twice from the floor, and then Coville opened up with another barrage of baskets.

McCann hit; Porter dropped in a free throw. Jay Blaisdell threw in two from in close, one of them an amazing one-handed shot with three Aggies around him. He was on tonight and he knew it. He had the range of the basket and he couldn't miss.

In fifteen minutes it was 33-9 for Coville, and Jay had accounted for more than half the Coville points.

Matty Grogan sent in relief men. Jay came out of the game, and Prentiss and McCann followed. Grogan said on the bench, "Hell, we ain't tryin' to make any records tonight, gang. We'll give the other guys a chance to play."

It was another of those nice little gestures. In big-time basketball most coaches ran the score up to the highest total they could possibly get, because that meant publicity for them.

At half time it was 58-22 for the Coville Terriers. They left the floor with the crowd cheering them enthusiastically. Jay had twenty-three points for himself in the first half, more than the whole Aggie team had been able to make.

In the dressing room Grogan said to him, "You're sparkin' this outfit tonight, Jay. Keep it up."

"Thanks," Jay said. He'd noticed something out on the floor during that first half, when he'd started to throw the ball through the hoop. The Coville players had started to feed him. And Prentiss had mentioned a scoring record somebody had held at Coville for half a dozen years or so. They wanted him to break that record.

Jay had stopped shooting after a while, giving the others a chance. When he was in the game with some of the relief men he deliberately fed them, knowing they didn't score too often during the season. He'd never done this before on a basketball court; he'd been too intent on piling up points himself. Tonight, it was different. These guys liked him. He would have felt cheap if he'd gone on trying to hog the show.

THE SECOND half it was the same way. The Aggies fought back hard, but they were completely outclassed. Even without Jay in the game, the Coville Terriers would have taken them. With Jay keeping the ball going all the time, stealing it away from the Aggies, dropping in occasional baskets, it was a walkaway.

Again Matty Grogan took out his first-string men, finishing the game with relief players. The score mounted to 85-46. Jay sat on the bench the last five minutes, watching, and the more he watched the more impressed he was with the coaching job Grogan was doing at this little school. Even the utility men were well-drilled, reeling off some very neat set plays.

The first time Jay had watched them he had not been impressed, but he realized now that he'd been missing something. The Terriers were coached by an old pro, and they were playing the pro game. At State Jay had been accustomed to a much faster game, and a much wilder game. The Terriers moved the ball more slowly, but, he saw now, more accurately. They kept possession of it; they took fewer shots, but when they let go for the hoop they usually scored.

Matty Grogan had a careless way of saying, "Hell, I don't know much about this game, gang, except what I picked up knockin' around." He'd evidently picked up plenty, and he knew how to pass it on, too.

In the dressing room when it was over the Terriers were jubilant. Prentiss said, his eyes shining, "We might even win the State title this year and get in the New England Tournament."

Jay Blaisdell winced a little. At State they'd been looking forward to the big National Tournament in New York, the National championship.

Matty Grogan grinned and said, "Don't get high-hat, kid. We're still small-town basketball." He glanced at Jay, sitting a few feet away, putting on his shoes. He said, "Ain't that right, Jay?"

Jay moistened his lips. He said, "This is a good club." Then he added, "One of the best-coached teams I've ever seen." He was speaking the truth, too, considering the fact that Grogan had had so little material to work with.

Matty Grogan reddened. He said with some embarrassment, "Hell, kid, you're just talkin' now." He did appreciate the compliment, though. Jay could see it in his eyes.

There was a crowd outside the dance hall when Jay came out, carrying his little valise. He wondered whether he ought to look around for Arabella Wicks, and he'd decided that it was foolish when he saw her standing at the corner, waiting for a few cars to pass.

The Coville students were heading back to the campus, most of them walking the mile or so back to the school. Jay walked up to the girl before she could cross. He said, "Uh—my car's still empty, Miss Wicks."

"No luck?" Arabella asked him.

Jay scowled. "I didn't ask anybody else," he said stiffly.

"I'm flattered," Miss Wicks told him. "Let's go."

On the way back she said, "You're a good basketball player, Mr. Blaisdell. You surprised me."

"Thank you," Jay said. He added, "I was playing with a pretty good team tonight, too."

She glanced at him as they sped down the highway, and said quietly, "I didn't quite expect you to say that. You—you came from State, didn't you?"

"That's right," Jay murmured. They didn't know anything about him down here. They'd kept the other business quiet, and he was just a transferee from a big university to a hick school. He said, "Why didn't you expect me to say it?"

Arabella shrugged. "I'll tell you some day," she grinned. "Now forget about it."

They stopped in a little store along the road where the proprietor tended his own soda fountain, and Jay Blaisdell was thinking that this was a far cry from the days at State when he'd returned from a basketball game with a sophisticated bunch, and they'd stopped in for drinks and dancing at some swanky roadhouse.

Strangely enough, the soda tasted good.

Quite a few Coville undergraduates had stopped in, too, and they waved and nodded to Jay and Arabella. There was a friendly spirit here which had been lacking at big State with its select fraternities, its aloofness.

Jay said thoughtfully, "This is a nice little school."

"You didn't think so," Arabella reminded him, "when you came the other afternoon. It wasn't what you'd expected, was it?"

"Not quite," Jay murmured. It was a crazy thought, but it persisted. He was thinking that he might even get to like it here!

3

Foul-line Fury

COVILLE played again two nights later at the dance hall, swamping a hapless Tech team by a 75-28 score, with Jay again leading the attack, piling up thirty-one points for himself.

The school was gradually going basketball-crazy. The players were having visions, and even Jay had a crazy notion in his head. In the big tournament in New York they usually invited some small, comparatively unknown team with an impressive record. This team would be the "dark horse" of the tournament. He was wondering if it could be arranged for the Terriers to get the invitation!

He had connections. He knew sportswriters through his father, and these men would come down to have a look at the Terriers in action. If what they saw pleased them and they plugged the Terriers, and if the team went through the remainder of the season undefeated, piling up these terrific scores, the incredible might happen.

It was a crazy dream, but Jay Blaisdell could see the Coville Terriers out on the smooth, shining hardwood of the New York Garden, in the National Basketball Tournament, playing against the best in the land.

The Terriers traveled to the next two games in a dinky bus, with only a few undergraduates able to accompany them. Again Grogan's well-coached quintet slaughtered the opposition. With each game they were getting better, working more smoothly, knowing each other better.

Out of the pitiful small squad with which he'd had to work Grogan had picked five men who had it in them. They could be taught, and the garbage collector worked with infinite patience, teaching them the shots, the tricks, the maneuvers on the court which he'd learned through his own years in pro basketball.

Watching him daily, Jay was more and more impressed by his teaching ability. Grogan was a natural for the job. He was able to instill confidence into his club. His modesty, the fact that he was working without pay, giving his time, making all kinds of sacrifices for the club, impressed the players. They went all out for him.

After the fifth straight win, Jay sent off several letters. A radio sports commentator named Brown was the first to show up at the school, the night of the Springton game, one of the big ones on the Coville schedule. Springton, an arch rival, had knocked over the Terriers six years straight, and they were supposed to be strong this year.

Brown, a quiet, lank, bespectacled man whom Jay had met at the state and in Florida on different occasions, wandered around the school grounds, looking things over, and then went up to Jay's room. He said, "Blaisdell, this is crazy. The student body here is less than three hundred. Are you trying to tell me that this Grogan has been able to turn out a team good enough to compete in the Garden Tournament?"

"Watch us tonight," Jay smiled. "Have a little talk with Matty Grogan yourself. You're going to have him on your program some night so you might as well get to know him."

Brown shook his head. "Grogan has as much chance of getting on my program as Joe Stalin. You're having pipe dreams, Jay."

"You'll see," Jay told him.

Brown saw that night. The Terriers were hot from the opening whistle. They'd speeded up their attack a little, having more confidence in themselves now, and they started to hit the cords thirty seconds after the game got under way.

Jay, who had been holding back a little in recent games, giving the other men chances to score, opened up tonight. Even he had learned a few things from Matty Grogan, and his game had improved. He dribbled less than he had done in the past; he took fewer wild shots, and as a result he hit the cords more often even though he hogged the ball less.

The Terriers piled up eighteen points before Springton scored, and the Coville crowd went mad. Jay hit the net; Prentiss, the chubby boy, improving vastly with each game, and a great playmaker now, hit twice from outside the foul lane, beautiful set shots. McCann scored from the bucket. Porter and Manning, stalwart defense men, and good shots besides, came through with a brace of baskets each.

Jay grinned over at Brown, sitting behind the Coville bench. Brown was looking at Matty Grogan strangely. The pro was standing up, yelling like a kid, his eyes shining.

Getting warmed up to his work, Jay scored three times in succession, one of them a twisting hook shot under the rim which drew a burst of applause from the crowd.

Springton fought back gamely, but they were out of their class. The Grogan set plays worked to perfection. Pick-offs and screens opened the Springton defense, and with the Terriers keeping possession of the ball most of the time, Springton never got going.

At half time it was 47-16, and Jay found Brown talking to Matty Grogan in the corridor. The big redhead was waving a hand deprecatingly, that big grin on his face.

Brown said to Jay, "You'll have some big-town reporters out this way for your next game, Jay. I'll see to that. I'll plug you." He scratched his chin and said thoughtfully, "I wonder how this little team would do on the Garden floor. I can't get over it yet."

In the dressing room between halves Jay said to Grogan, "I'd like to say a few words to the team."

"Talk all you want," Grogan chuckled. "This is open house."

Jay said quietly, "You fellows might not believe this, and it still is a long way off, but Coville has a chance of getting into the Tournament."

Prentiss nodded. "I thought so, too," he said. "The papers have been plugging us. If we go through undefeated we might get the bid to the Tournament." He looked up at the ceiling and said, "Imagine playing in the State Tournament."

Jay smiled. "I'm not talking about the State Tournament," he said. "This is New York—the New York Garden, the National Tournament, the big one."

He saw their eyes popping out. Even Matty Grogan was staring at him a little dazedly. Jay went on coolly, "We have the biggest radio sports commentator in the country plugging us. We'll have sportswriters coming down to look at us if we pile up big enough scores. I think we'll get the bid, and I think we'll do pretty good in New York."

Jim McCann was swallowing, blinking, swallowing. He repeated weakly, "In New York—New York."

That was it—the Mecca of all basketball players—the big Garden with its balconies, its huge crowds, its beautiful hardwood floors and glass backboards.

They didn't say anything for a while. They just looked at Jay as he went on talking, calmly, confidently. When he finished Ed Prentiss said softly, "You're the Pied Piper, Jay. Lead us to the Garden."

"Not me," Jay Blaisdell said. He

nodded to Matty Grogan and he said, "Matty's the Piper. We've got one of the best coaches in the country at Coville."

"Hell," Matty Grogan said weakly. "You're nuts, kid. I'm just an old pro."

They went out on the court and when they finished with Springton they had scored ninety-eight points....

Jay rode back with Arabella Wicks. He said, "You remember the first afternoon I came here, you asked me to room with Ed Prentiss?"

"I remember," Arabella said.

"I'd like to go in with Prentiss now," Jay said quietly. "I think he'd still like a roommate. Can you arrange it?"

The girl looked at him as he sat behind the wheel of the roadster. She said softly, "I'm very happy to hear that, Jay. Ed will be glad to have you. He's even asked me to talk to you about it."

"He's a pretty nice guy," Jay said. "We'll get along."

He was suddenly very glad, too, that he was getting along with Arabella Wicks.

COVILLE continued its winning streak. Sportswriters, tipped off by Brown, came down to watch and went away talking to themselves. They did more talking on their typewriters, and the snowball began to grow. The dance hall was jammed for every game. When Coville traveled they drew big crowds for the out-of-town games, and they continued to win by lopsided scores.

The last game of the season was played in the dance hall against Coville's biggest rival, Harlan U. from upstate. Harlan had a fourteen-game winning streak, and they were rated the best team in the state. Coville took them, 73-48.

The next afternoon Matty Grogan came up to the school with a telegram. He'd parked his garbage truck somewhere and he came up to the administration building, looking for basketball players, a dazed expression on his face.

Jay and Ed Prentiss spotted him first. Grogan could hardly talk. He shoved the telegram at Jay and he said huskily, "This must be a joke, kid."

Jay read it, and a broad smile spread across his face. It was the invitation to play in the New York Tournament, the opening round to take place within one week. Coville had been selected as the best team in their sector.

Ed Prentiss was reading the telegram, and then he let out a whoop which brought a crowd of students around him. Jay said slowly, "That's it."

They had a celebration on the campus that night. A big bonfire blazed away in front of an improvised speaking stand. The dean was called out to speak, and then Matty Grogan was lifted up on the stand. He stood there, looking out over the smiling crowd, and he started to say, "Hell, boys, I—" He stopped short and started over again because there were girls in the crowd. He said, "I'm proud of this team—the greatest bunch I've ever seen. I think we can lick 'em—everybody."

That was the end of his speech, but they cheered wildly when he leaped down. Jay noticed that the little dean was walking around in a kind of daze, too, not accustomed to so much publicity. Reporters were flocking down. Photographers were showing up to take pictures of the team, of the little school, now the dark horse of the big Tournament.

Arabella Wicks, standing next to Jay in the crowd, said quietly, "This is the greatest thing that ever happened at Coville. It's given us a lift. We've been in the doldrums for a long time, just going through the motions of being a college. Now maybe there'll be a change. Some of the alumni, who've forgotten about us, might open up with contributions. We might get our own gymnasium and a new dormitory which we need badly." She looked at Jay and she added, "Most of this has happened since you came to Coville.

We owe you a lot, and we're grateful."

Jay blinked. In all his life he didn't remember doing anything for anybody but himself, and this was a new sensation, a nice one, too.

"I didn't do anything," Jay protested. "I just notified some sports men that we had a great team at Coville. That's the truth."

"That was enough," Arabella smiled, "although there were other things. Do you actually think we have a chance in the Tournament?"

"They wouldn't have invited us," Jay said, "if they didn't think so."

They walked around the campus, listening to the noise, the cheering, and Jay Blaisdell didn't remember a time in his life when he'd felt better, happier. Tonight, the campus seemed cozy, the old brick buildings had lost their harshness in the firelight, and they seemed almost beautiful. He wondered that he hadn't noticed these things before.

"This is a nice little school," Jay murmured.

"The longer you stay," Arabella said, "the better you'll like it. It's that kind of place."

"I wouldn't doubt it," Jay smiled, "and I believe the same goes with some people." He glanced at her as they walked, and he noticed that she was smiling, too. He felt very good this night.

They moved out to the edge of the crowd, and turned to look back at the bonfire. They were standing there when they saw a man moving past them, mopping at his face with a handkerchief. As he passed under an overhead light they had a glimpse of his face. It seemed haggard, pale under the yellow light. It was the face of Matty Grogan.

Arabella had noticed it, too. She said to Jay when Grogan had gone on, evidently headed back for town, "What—what's the matter with him? He didn't look well."

Jay shook his head. "Maybe the excitement," he murmured. "This whole business has been quite a strain on Matty. He's rather excitable to begin with. You can see by the way he acts on the bench during a game."

"I hope that's all it is," Arabella said slowly. "Matty's going to be the lion of New York during this tournament, if I'm not mistaken. I'd hate to see him miss it."

THE TERRIERS were supposed to practice the next afternoon. They'd drawn the powerful Lakeland U. quintet from the midwest as their first opponent in the Tournament. Lakeland had an impressive record, a big team. Matty Grogan had wanted to work on a few new set plays he'd doped out, and he felt that they needed a few practice sessions to perfect them.

Jay went down to the dance hall with Ed Prentiss. Most of the players were already out on the floor, but Matty hadn't showed up yet. This was unusual because Grogan was always out on the floor himself before the players arrived, shooting baskets, getting his workout.

Jay said to McCann, "Matty call up, Jim?"

The center looked at him, and then around the gym, as if for the first time noticing that Grogan wasn't present. He said, "No. It is funny, isn't it?"

Ed Prentiss said, "I have his phone number. He lives at a boarding house in town. We can get his landlady."

Jay frowned. He felt the first vague apprehension. Matty had not looked good last night after he'd made his brief speech on the platform.

"We'll give him a ring," Jay said. "Maybe he was just delayed with the truck."

They went to a phone booth in the dance hall, and Prentiss put through the call, Jay standing outside the open booth,

listening. He watched the chubby boy's face as he spoke to the landlady, and he saw it fall.

"Sick?" Prentiss muttered. "He's had a doctor in this morning?"

Jay started to feel sick, himself. When Prentiss hung up, he said, "I was afraid of that. He didn't look at all good last night."

"I remember," Prentiss said, "that he'd been out in a pouring rain a whole morning with the truck last week, and he told me he'd caught a little cold."

"It's evidently gotten worse," Jay said. "We'll have to go over."

"He's not the kind of a guy who will take care of himself," Prentiss muttered. "You know Matty."

They got dressed and went over to the boarding house in Jay's car. Matty's landlady let them in. She said after they'd introduced themselves, "He should have some care. I'm so busy around here I can't look after him, myself. The doctor left some medicine this morning, but it doesn't look like he's any better."

They went upstairs. Grogan had a room on the second floor, at the end of the corridor. The door was open and they went in. Grogan lay on the bed, his face bathed in perspiration, eyes wild, feverish.

Jay took one look at him and then ran down the stairs. He got the doctor's phone number from the landlady and he put his call through. The physician came in five minutes. He came into the room, walked over to Matty Grogan's bed, and then turned around and went outside again. They could hear him telephoning the hospital for an ambulance.

Ed Prentiss sat on a chair at Grogan's bedside, looking sick and scared. Matty Grogan didn't know them. He was mumbling, staring up at the ceiling. Prentiss said slowly, "Pneumonia?"

Jay nodded. He wished that he had it, himself, instead of Matty Grogan.

4

Hit That Hoop!

THEY followed the ambulance to the hospital, and Jay spoke to the woman at the desk. He ordered a private room for the Coville coach, day and night nurses if necessary, specialists. He told her to send him the bill.

They went back to the dance hall and broke the news to the others. Jay looked at their shocked faces. McCann said slowly, "It can't be true. Not Matty."

There was no practice session that afternoon. In two days they were to leave for New York. They stood around on the gym floor, looking at each other. Porter said finally, "He won't be able to come with us. He's in for a spell."

Jim McCann nodded. He cleared his throat and said, "We'll need somebody to—to kind of take Matty's place for a while. I nominate Jay."

It was a unanimous vote. He didn't make a speech. They didn't want to hear a speech. He just nodded. He said, "We'd better have a little practice session tomorrow afternoon."

THEY stood on the platform, waiting for the train to come in. They carried their suitcases, and they stood under the awning, watching the rain.

There was a crowd from the school to see them off—a silent crowd. Arabella Wicks came over to Jay. She said, "Good luck, Jay. We're all pulling for you."

Jay nodded. They were going to need luck to get past the first round of the Tournament. This team was licked even before it got on the train for New York. He could see it in their faces. He said miserably, "We'll do the best we can."

The train rolled in and they got on. They sat in their seats and the conductor

came down the aisle. He looked at them and said jovially, "You boys going to a Funeral Directors' Convention?"

"That's about it," Ed Prentiss told him bitterly.

THEY had a light workout on the Garden floor. They got the feel of the hardwood, the feel of the backboard. Jay looked up at the tiers of seats, the tremendously high ceiling, the flag-draped rafters. Even State had not played here —not good enough!

Reporters were down on the floor, asking questions. Brown, the radio sports commentator, was looking for Matty Grogan. He stared when Jay told him the news. Then he said softly, "You boys really *are* the dark horses, aren't you?"

They were out on the court that night, the opening night of the big Tournament. The Garden was jammed to the rafters, the bright lights on, the floor looking as if it had been newly varnished and waxed.

Lakeland was at the other end of the court. They were very tall men, very adept with a basketball. They were resplendent in purple and gold outfits, purple and gold silk jackets and sweat pants, new black sneakers with white laces.

The dozen boys from Coville in their green and white, motheaten outfits, no sweat pants, inexpensive jackets, looked like a hick team in comparison. They acted like one, too, on the floor. Their movements were uncertain. They missed the lay-ups; they couldn't hit the net with the long ones during the practice session, and the big crowd stared at them in amazement.

Jay said grimly, "We have to snap out of it, gang. We can't disgrace Coville, and we can't disgrace Grogan."

He saw the whole house of cards tumbling down in front of him. They would return to Coville soundly whipped, and not only whipped but disgraced before the biggest audience in the land. Men like Brown and the other reporters who had gone out on a limb for them would be ridiculed. Never again would a Coville team rise to the heights. They would sink back into obscurity now, an obscurity worse than it had been before because they'd had a taste of glory.

The crowd was still muttering when the referee walked out to the center of the floor with the ball and waited for the rival jump men. Jay drew a six-foot-three giant, the Lakeland star, one of the middlewest high scorers. His name was Anderson.

For a tall man Anderson was very fast, too. He broke away on the tap, stealing the ball away from Ed Prentiss, who was about six inches shorter than he was.

Lakeland had a lot of snap, a lot of drive. They moved the ball fast, surely, and they set it up nicely, blocking Porter out on a screen, sending one of their

tall men up toward the rim. The first shot was good, and Lakeland was off to a flying start.

Coville took the ball under their own basket, worked it out and over the ten-second line, and then Ed Prentiss made a bad pass and Lakeland recovered. They were away very swiftly, driving at the basket.

Jay sprinted back with Anderson. He blocked Anderson's shot for the hoop, but another tall Lakelander retrieved the ball and pushed it through the cords for another field goal.

Again Coville tried to get started. There were a few passes. McCann worked into the bucket. He lost the ball when Manning fired it in to him.

Lakeland scored again thirty seconds later, their big center dropping a hook shot, making it 6-0.

It was the beginning of a slaughter. The Terriers were bottled up by the taller Lakeland men. Their passing was poor, without snap. They were unable to get up close enough for good shots.

The score went to 16-0 before Coville scored, Jay himself breaking through in a desperate sortee, to net the ball under the basket.

The crowd was beginning to boo now. Jay called time out. He looked at the four men in the huddle and said quietly, "We can't let them do this. This isn't Matty Grogan's team. Let's go." He saw Ed Prentiss glance toward the bench, and he knew who Prentiss was looking for. They all missed the big redhead on the bench.

Lakeland went to work again. Lakeland scored three times from the floor before Jay again got in close enough for a shot. He made it good on a pass from McCann.

Red-faced Tournament officials watched and looked grimly at the press box where the reporters sat who'd persuaded them that Coville was good enough to play in this Tournament. After eight minutes of basketball Lakeland led by 24-4, and it appeared to be getting worse.

Desperately Jay battled to stem the tide. He hurled himself up toward the boards on the Lakeland shots, fighting to retrieve the ball. He tore in at his own basket, taking occasional passes from outside, trying to get that ball moving fast the way they'd moved it in other games. It was no use.

At half time it was 49-15 for Lakeland, and Jay had scored twelve of the fifteen points. He got a hand from the crowd, but there were boos for the team as a whole as they left the floor, completely outclassed, having shown nothing.

GLUM, dispirited, they went into the dressing room and Jay closed the door behind them. They sat there and nobody said anything. Jay had a drink at the fountain and came back. Ed Prentiss said to him, "It's a good thing we have one basketball player on this squad. They'd have shut us out."

"Nonsense," Jay snapped. "We haven't started yet. We have a whole half to go."

Prentiss smiled wearily. He said slowly, "Did you hear them boo? Of course they don't know about Matty. It hasn't been in the papers yet."

"Would Matty Grogan want you to quit?" Jay demanded. "Is he a quitter, himself?"

Prentiss shook his head, but the talk wasn't getting anywhere. They were licked and they knew it. They wanted a place to lie down. Jay turned away. He went over to his locker and stood there, pretending he was looking for something in his coat pocket. There was a mist of tears in his eyes.

There was a knock on the door then, and McCann went over. He called from the door, "Jay, it's your father."

Mr. Blaisdell had wired that he'd be down for the opening Tourament game,

but Jay hadn't been able to spot him in the audience. He went outside, closing the door behind him.

J. C. Blaisdell was a big man with iron-gray hair. His manner was a little pompous. He frowned at Jay after shaking hands and said, "I came down here with a half dozen friends, business acquaintances. All the way here on the train I was bragging about this little team you've written to me about. What's going on? Why aren't you scoring?"

"We—just can't get started," Jay said.

"I'd say your club quit before they tried to get started," Mr. Blaisdell told him grimly. "I'm glad you've been giving it the best you have, anyway, but I think I made a mistake sending you to that hick school. I can get you in to West Coast U. next year. What do you say?"

Jay stared at him. West Coast was in this Tournament—a heavy favorite to win it, too. Very quietly Jay said, "I don't want to go to West Coast, Dad. Coville is my school from now on."

"Damn it all," Mr. Blaisdell exploded. "With West Coast you could be All-American." He had another thought. "Where is the coach of this team anyway? I didn't see anyone on the bench."

"He caught pneumonia," Jay said, "driving his garbage truck."

"Garbage truck!" J. C. howled. "And he's the coach at Coville?"

"The best coach in the business," Jay Blaisdell said grimly. He was raising his voice, too, now, because he had some of his father's temper.

"You're going out to West Coast," J. C. snapped. "What'll my business associates and my friends think—a garbage collector! My boy, we have social standing."

"I'll sell my social standing," Jay grated, "for a seat on Matty Grogan's garbage truck. I go to Coville next year if I have to work my way through collecting garbage. That's how I feel about it, dad."

His father stared at him for several long moments, and then he said, "What in thunder and blazes has happened to you, son?"

"You'd see," Jay told him slowly, "if Matty Grogan was here. You'd see a basketball team." He turned and went back into the dressing room. He surprised the whole Coville quintet sitting on benches, on chairs, facing the door, startled expressions on their faces. Prentiss had been staring up toward the opened transom over the door, and Jay realized this team had heard every word between himself and his father.

Jim McCann was swallowing a lump in his throat. He looked at Jay steadily, and he said, "We couldn't help overhearing that, Jay. We weren't trying to eavesdrop. Did you mean what you said out there?"

"Sure I meant it," Jay said. "Win, lose or draw I go back to Coville. My father has enough money to buy the whole school and give it away to somebody. He can keep his money."

Ed Prentiss got up and started to walk around. He was biting his lip. He stopped in front of Jay and said quietly, "You're a pretty decent guy, Jay."

"Cut it out," Jay said.

Porter and Manning, the other regulars, were rubbing their hands. Porter said, "I wonder if we can catch up to this bunch. They got an idea they're going right through this Tournament without a hitch. We're just the first stepping stones."

Jay saw the animation coming into the faces of the other men in the room. There was a new spirit here. Jay could almost feel it in the air.

A knock came on the door, and a boy handed Jay a telegram and a pad to sign. Jay tore the envelope open. It was from Arabella Wicks. It read:

GROGAN OUT OF COMA. FIRST WORDS HIT THAT HOOP. IMPROVING STEADILY.

Ed Prentiss had tears in his eyes as he repeated, " 'Hit that hoop!' That's Matty all over. He always used to yell that."

"Hit that hoop!" Jim McCann murmured. "Let's do it!"

They were standing up. They wanted to go out. Jay said, "They can't stop us. We're better than they are. You hear me?"

It was time to go out again, and they made a rush for the door. They came out on the court grinning, clapping their hands, and the crowd stared at them. Up on the board the score was Lakeland 49, Coville 15. It didn't make sense.

"Hit it," Ed Prentiss yelled. "Hit that hoop!"

Porter shouted it back to him. They were ready when the whistle blew. They went off with a bang. Jay slashed in to take the ball away from the tall Anderson. He whipped it to Prentiss, and Ed snapped it away to Porter.

IT STARTED to move; it was alive. There was snap to it. They went over the ten-second line, the ball flowing from man to man. McCann slid into the bucket and they worked it in and out. They drew it into the corners, and then Prentiss worked a beautiful screen, springing Porter loose.

Porter slid in toward the rim, took the snap pass from Jay Blaisdell, and then went up high for the hoop. Jim McCann roared, "Hit that hoop!"

It went in, and Coville was off. Jay hit it a moment later with a set shot from outside. McCann came through with a follow-up after missing another set shot.

Ed Prentiss wriggled his way through madly, taking a bounce pass from Manning. He was in on the net, going up with Lakeland players hanging onto him. His shot was good and he had a free throw besides.

They poured it on, and the crowd began to wake up, to sense the fact that this was turning into a basketball game. The Terriers scored fourteen points in a row before Lakeland was able to score from the foul line.

Then the crowd began to yell, all for the underdogs now, and Coville poured on still more speed. The taller, slower Lakeland quintet was dazzled by the lightning passwork. They kept the ball low, bouncing it a great deal, going in and under Lakeland, and the shooting was phenomenal. Every time a Coville man went up toward the rim the others shouted, "Hit it—hit it!"

After a while the crowd took up the shout, and the Terriers seldom missed. Time and again Lakeland called for rest periods in an attempt to stop the tide, but it was no use. Jay made occasional replacements to give his men brief rests, but the regulars were all back in during the final hectic ten minutes, with Lakeland leading 61-53.

Eight points separated the two teams after another Lakeland time out. Jay said, "We're going to pass them now. We're going ahead."

He dropped in the first one, himself, a beautiful shot from in close, a drive in from the right corner, a pass from Prentiss, switching the ball from one hand to the other while in midair, and then the push-up.

Prentiss dropped another from the corner, the ball clipping the cords neatly, and the crowd howled. In the press box typewriters were clacking madly.

With less than five minutes to go Coville tied it up on McCann's hook shot from the bucket, and then Lakeland suddenly came to life with a field goal and a free throw to give them a three-point lead again. It was disheartening.

Jay Blaisdell looked at his tired teammates. He said, "Four points for Matty Grogan."

That was the slogan. They took the ball and they put on the pressure. They kept it moving so fast that Lakeland couldn't keep track of it. There were no bad passes, no bad shots. They moved like parts of one smooth machine.

Prentiss finally broke loose on a screen. He came in from the right side of the foul line, and he looped the ball up gently. It dropped through, and they were one point behind Lakeland.

The crowd was standing up, cheering wildly now, with only a few minutes remaining. Lakeland tried to freeze the ball inside the ten-second line, and they succeeded for more than a minute with the Terriers desperately trying to break in and take it away.

McCann got a hand on the ball, deflecting a pass. Jay leaped in to snatch it from the floor. He moved away, dribbling madly down the court while the crowd screamed. His pass to Prentiss put the ball within shooting distance. Prentiss faked a shot at the rim, whipped the ball to Porter and Porter shot it to Jay driving in from the right alley.

Big Anderson was right with Jay. They went up together for the rim, and Prentiss shouted hoarsely, "Hit that hoop!"

Jay hit it. The ball caromed off the glass, touching it lightly, and dropped through the net. The gun went off seconds later as Lakeland tried to rush the ball up the court. It was Coville 72, Lakeland 71!

A hysterical crowd cheered the Coville Terriers as they trotted from the floor, their moth-eaten jackets over their shoulders, the strain of this game still on their faces.

Jim McCann said as they went into the dressing room, "That's one. We'll win more."

"We'll win them all," Ed Prentiss told him. "Remember that!"

J. C. Blaisdell came in, grinning from ear to ear, breathless, hoarse from shouting. He pounded Jay's back and roared, "Why didn't you tell me about this great little team? The greatest thing in basketball. Everybody's saying so. I want to come up and see this school. Where in the hell is it anyway?"

"I'd like you to see it," Jay smiled, "and I'd like you to meet the coach, Matty Grogan."

"I want to know why the coach of *our* club has to drive a garbage truck," J. C. Blaisdell said belligerently. "Why can't we afford to pay him full time?"

"You're the money-bags around here," Jay smiled. "You figure that out, Dad."

"I'll figure it out," J. C. Blaisdell told him flatly. "You'll see."

"While you're figuring that out," Jay added, winking at the other men in the room, "I might add that we also need a gymnasium. Ours burned down a couple of years ago."

"I'll have a look at the whole place," J. C. said. "Some of my business associates who saw this game might like to make small contributions to bring down their taxes. We'll see what we can do."

When his father left Jay slipped into his coat. He looked at the men in the room. They were still talking about the astounding developments of this night, unable to get over it.

Prentiss called to him as he went to the door, "What's the hurry, Jay?"

"I have to make a phone call," Jay told him.

Prentiss grinned. "Long distance," he said, "and her name begins with an A. Give her my regards."

"I'll do that," Jay Blaisdell laughed. As he walked down the corridor to a phone booth he was as happy as he'd ever been in his life. It was going to remain that way, too. He felt it.

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

He was against the ropes and the world was tipping sidewise.

The guys you lick don't make you a champ, kid—it's the guys who lick you . . . whose red leather roars till that final gong —

STAND UP and SLUG!

HE HADN'T wanted to fight Benjy Lobra, but Max had insisted that he had to, saying, "Zack, boy, in this division you got to get by Benjy. Old Lobra, the chopping block. Why . . . trying to get a match with the leading contenders without getting past Benjy would be like trying to get into college without going to high school."

Zack stood with the towel over his shoulders, still breathing deep and hard from the workout. "But the guy is my friend! Dammit, Max, I wouldn't even be in this racket if Benjy hadn't been in my outfit. I know I can lick him. The sportswriters know I can lick him. The wise money knows I can lick him. So why do I have to go out and pound a guy

that helped me build nice deep foxholes and split rations with me and saved my neck twice? Already Benjy is a little slow in the head. Maybe I'll be the guy to really put him over the edge. I can't go out there and pull punches."

Max shrugged. "Benjy wants the match. Maybe Benjy's smart. A boy's best friend is his bankroll. It'll draw good. I say you got to do it, or I can't wangle a match with Steiner or Brock or Joe Canada. Their managers all tell me to get you by Benjy just like they had to do with their boys."

And because Zack Haines finally realized that it had to be done, he gave Max the go-ahead. And it was booked as the main in the Garden.

Three days before the weigh-in, Zack ran into Benjy Lobra eating alone at a cafeteria where the dills come with just the right amount of garlic.

Zack took his own tray over to the table for two. Benjy Lobra's big gray face split into a grin. He was a squat man, carrying the middleweight's hundred and sixty pounds in sloping shoulders, in corded bandy legs, in crowbar wrists. The scar-tissue ridges on his brows, the punch-thickened lips and the spread nose gave him the look of an amiable and over-bright chimpanzee. He was a man of simple tastes, of mounting annuities, and his hobby was making jewelry.

"Hey, Zack boy," he said. "How's my favorite middleweight? Next to me, naturally."

Zack felt the good warm feeling of friendship, of things shared. He forced a grin. "Able to lick a broke-down old horse like you. Who'd you fight last? Harry Greb?"

"Naw. Stan Ketchel. 1909. T.K.O."

Zack put his tray aside and sat down to the meal. He looked down at the food and said, "Benjy, honest, I didn't want this bout."

"Scared of me?"

"I don't want to fight you. I don't want to have to try to lick you."

Benjy grinned again. "Everybody gets their chance, kid. I'm the stumbling block on the road to success. I beat on 'em on the way up and then, couple years later, I beat on 'em on the way down. Fighters come and go. Lobra goes on forever."

"How about the headaches?" Zack asked seriously.

"Better lately, kid. A lot better."

"Why don't you quit? You got it stashed away."

"Quit! When I got about fifteen more good bouts in me! You nuts?"

Zack leaned across the table, his eyes intense. "Benjy, I got it. I know I've got it. I don't need a lot more time before I can take the champ. And, hell, you know the knockouts I've been piling up. You read the stories on the West Coast trip. Those weren't tankers. Those were pretty fair boys. I'm not breaking a wrist, slapping myself on the back, Benjy. I know I can lick you."

Benjy had a sudden hooded look as the lids came halfway down over his eyes. "You can't lick me by telling me about it. You got to try, kid."

They ate in silence for a time. Benjy finished. He stood up and put a heavy hand on Zack Haines' shoulder.

His grin was wide again. "Come out punching, kid," he said. Zack turned and watched the bandy-legged walk, the shoulder-sway, as the durable Benjy Lobra left the cafeteria. Zack had a sour taste in his mouth. He pushed away the unfinished meal. The least he could do for Benjy was to make it short. Not the knockout route. No, Benjy had a jaw like a Vermont boulder. Open up those old scars over the eyes. One over each eye. A TKO just as fast as he could manage it.

There was, of course, no problem of style involved. Benjy always bored in, always moved in with that flat-footed shuffle, hands held low, chin on the chest,

ready with those booming body punches that sucked the strength out of a man as though they made holes in his middle.

And Zack knew that with his own heads-up style, with the flicking left, the short hard sudden-death right, he was tailored to lick Benjy's style.

THE HOUSE lights faded out and the hard hot ring lights beat down on them. The usual crowd. The high-waisted blondes with the intricate hairdos, the chomp of jaws on the damp cigar butts, the hard stare of the TV lenses, the forty-dollar neckties, the cold gray eyes of wise money.

Max was that rare manager, one who liked to work the corner and knew how. Zack went back. The stool was gone. He bit on the mouthpiece, tapped it more firmly in place with the tip of his glove, turned to put the collar of the robe where Doc could reach it and yank it off.

At the bell he met Benjy in the middle of the ring and they touched gloves. Benjy gave him a solemn wink. All of Benjy's body was the same gray as his face, broken only by the harsh mat of hair, an inverted triangle on his deep chest. Zack was half a head taller, slim in the waist, with high square shoulders, with the ovoid pads of muscle under the shoulderblades that are the mark of the hitter.

He moved well up on his toes as Benjy came in with the old familiar flat-footed shuffle. Zack had no heart for the fight.

Zack stabbed with the left. Benjy ducked into it, taking it high on the head. He stabbed twice more, feinted to the right, moved back and chunked the right hand at Benjy's eyes. It hit harmlessly on the forehead, but the smack of it brought a low growl from the crowd. Benjy still shuffled in. He hadn't thrown a punch yet. Too old and too wise to get arm-weary for nothing.

Zack ripped out with the left jab again. Benjy pawed at Zack's middle, left and right and left. One missed and the other two, though they seemed like slow-motion punches, hit with a deep solid sodden force that sent a stab of pain up into the back of his throat.

Benjy rushed him against the ropes, clinched and freed one hand to chop down twice on the kidneys, hitting with the hard side of his wrist as much as with his glove. Zack gasped with the pain. Okay, an accident. Benjy stepped hard on his instep, rammed a shoulder up against Zack's jaw, rubbed him up the nose with his laces. The referee broke them and Benjy hit on the break, a punch that landed high on Zack's cheek.

One little clinch and Zack felt as if somebody had worked him over with a jackhammer.

"What the hell, Benjy," he muttered.

"You wanna fight or dance?" Benjy growled, his voice distorted by the mouthguard.

Zack moved in more earnestly. He jabbed with the left, feinted with the right, slammed a left hook deep, crossed over with the right. The right bounced off Benjy's hunched left shoulder. Benjy sent another boomer downstairs and rushed Zack back against the ropes. The bell sounded and Zack gratefully raised both his arms. Benjy belted the wind out of him and turned back toward his own corner, shrugging as the referee warned him.

"That's a great friend you got," Max said. His voice was bitter.

"He plays rough," Zack said softly. He rinsed out his mouth, spat into the bucket.

He went out for the second round. Benjy extended his gloved hands. Zack, taken in by the gesture, reached to touch gloves. The hard right caught him flat-footed. He went down hard, his head thumping the canvas. He shook his head to clear it, got up onto one knee and picked up the count at six. He looked at Benjy standing in the neutral corner. The crowd was booing and hissing. Benjy

stared hard at Zack with a sullen expression.

As Zack got to his feet, Benjy rushed him. Zack got in a hard left and right before Benjy shoved him into the corner, leaned hard on him. Benjy got an arm loose, swiped Zack across the mouth, jammed a hard elbow in his throat. Zack twisted away and Benjy butted him in the mouth. He felt the warm blood behind his lips. He felt the cold fury, the long-delayed fury rising up in him.

At the break he was ready for the sucker punch, blocked it, drove his own right deep into the little band of flesh that overlapped the top of Benjy's trunks. He was glad to see Benjy's jaw sag with the blow. He followed it up with two jolting lefts to the mouth, a right cross. Benjy, his eyes glazed, still shuffled forward, trying to move inside. Zack let go with the right again and Benjy went down onto one knee at the bell.

"You look like great pals out there," Max said.

At the bell for the third Benjy had made a fast recovery. He seemed almost to be gaining strength. He got a left and right into Zack's middle. Each punch felt as though it were ripping his stomach loose and setting it adrift. Zack sucked air, bounced on his toes, kept his distance with the long left until breathing became automatic once more. During the next clinch Benjy butted him again, trampled his feet, filled Zack's face with elbows.

Before the bell for the fourth Max said, "You don't look so good out there. He's got two out of the three."

Zack went in cautiously. Too cautiously. A left to the middle cramped him and a high hard right to the temple filled his head with gray smoke. He moved three steps on wooden legs and tried to clinch. Benjy chopped and grunted and hacked at him in the clinch and Zack came out of it in worse shape than he'd gone in. He half blocked a left and right to the head, his back against the ropes, and the blows were no longer sharp. He felt as though Benjy were hitting him through feather cushions. He wanted to laugh. The mouthguard was gone. Then the world tipped slowly sideways and canvas was rough against his cheek. With no transition he was sitting loose on the stool, Max's hand pushing the small of his back as the bell sounded. He stood up and gray shoulders in front of him worked like a man swimming.

Thud and grunt and the gray hazy world.

"Round?" he asked thickly.

"Eighth coming up," Max answered, his voice harsh and worried.

Zack shook his head. "How'm I going?"

"You got maybe one. Snap out of it, kid. You're dreaming out there."

He went woodenly out at the bell, his feet planted firmly. Little gray man always shuffling in at him. Shuffling in. Got to stop him from coming at me. Got to stand still. Got to keep him from grabbing me. Hurts me when he grabs me. Keep him away and make him stand still. He stretched his lips in an empty grin. Maybe shuffle toward him a little and see how he likes it.

There was the gray man and there were the fists, floating up at him like balloons, hitting like the blunt ends of concrete piling.

Zack kept his chin down on his chest. He held his arms low and hooked, standing his ground. Like working on the heavy bag. Just like that. Get a rhythm. Left, right, left, right. Keep it working. Heels flat on the floor. Don't let him grab. Stop him short. Left, right, left, right. Little gray man with a gray face. No, not as gray as it was. Getting red now. Getting smeared. Left, right, left, right. Shoulders in it. Back in it. Rhythm, like chopping wood.

He grinned through the pain, through the mists that swirled inside him, through the tearing of the breath in his throat. Now move in on him a little. Make him back up. See how he likes it. One foot and then the other. Hit with the left and then plant the left foot a little ahead. Hit with the right and plant the right foot ahead. Some silly character had driven the fire department into the Garden. All the sirens were turned on full. His arms were filled with rocks. They were like long stockings chock full of gravel. Couldn't hardly hoist them up. Face almost all red now. No more walking. Ropes ahead. Gray man on the ropes. And then just the ropes. He stood with his hands at his sides, staring stupidly at the empty ropes. Somebody yanked on his arm, spun him around, shoved him toward a far corner. He made it, somehow. He laid his dead arms along the top rope and sagged in the corner. Arm in a white shirt sleeve flashing up and down. Then both arms spread.

He slid down until he was on his knees, his arms still hooked over the ropes. They picked him up. The sirens had been turned off. The white ranks of faces spun in a slow misty circle. He wanted to be sick to his stomach.

THE RUBDOWN hadn't done much good and the shower hadn't done much either. Zack wanted to fall into a bed and sleep until after Christmas.

He tucked his shirt into his pants and stood in front of the mirror to tie his tie. A great purple-blue mouse under one eye. Adhesive, startlingly white against his tanned skin, on both brows. Lips puffed tight like a couple of poorly stuffed sausages.

The worst was the bone-ache, the deep hard steady ache of the hammering he had taken.

He took the tie clip out of his shirt pocket and put it on. Next the jacket, the Brooksie jacket with no shoulder padding. He combed his damp hair, gave his reflection a wry smile and went out into the dressing room. The reporters had already left.

Benjy sat fully dressed, on the rubbing table, swinging his short legs. His face looked as though a giant had grabbed his ankles and used him to hammer in fence posts.

Zack felt the fast hard return of anger. He stopped, facing Benjy, two feet away. "Of all the dirty scum fighters I ever saw—"

Benjy's grin was unshaken. "Kid, you creamed me good."

"And for one thin dime I'd give it to you again right here."

Benjy looked puzzled. "Hey, kid! What's a point in that? You got to lick

(Continued on page 127)

ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

By JOE HAMMER

IF THERE'S more fun than run in your system, or if a dumbbell, to you, is a guy who keeps lifting a little iron weight and then putting it down again—this is the league for you. The only excess fat that matters is between the ears; the guy who swings the meanest pencil wins. Play alone, or with a friend; score as indicated. *(Answers on page 79.)*

Football—Top score, 17-0.

1. *A touchdown for you* if you can tell us what famous halfback established pro football as a nationally popular sport.

2. What college team made the all-time high score of 227-0 in a single game? *Answer correctly, and you convert.*

3. What college team ran up 55 wins while unbeaten? *This gives you a field goal.*

4. *Another touchdown if you get this one:* Who coached five Rose Bowl teams—and won all five games?

5. *Try this for the conversion:* The winner of the annual playoff between ——— and ——— gains possession of the Ed Thorp Memorial Trophy.

Baseball—Top score, 4-0.

6. The record baseball throw, by Sheldon Lejeune in 1910, was—216 ft.? 305 ft.? 426 ft.? *Answer correctly, and you go to first.*

7. *This one boosts you to second.* Can you identify the longest scoreless tie game in big-league history?

8. Record time for circling the bases is—13.3 seconds? 15.5 seconds? 19.9 seconds? *Guess right, and the next man triples to bring in two runs.*

9. What famous player pitched three shutouts in a three-game series? *This takes the man on third home.*

10. If you've struck out or died on base, here's your chance to make up. Tell us what big-league moundsman won every series game he pitched, *and we'll give you a homer.*

Hockey—Score 1 for each correct answer.

11. What American city was the first to support a professional hockey team?

12. True or false? No one knows for certain when or where ice hockey originated.

13. What team was plagued by the longest losing streak—15 straight?

14. What team racked up a record of 23 consecutive games without a defeat?

15. Can you name the oldest member of the National Hockey League?

Miscellany—Score 1 for each.

16. What Argentine game was so rough that at one time it was banned by the government?

17. The world's diving depth record is—300 ft.? 475 ft.? 550 ft.?

18. What ex-bare-knuckle prize fighter promoted the first horse-race meeting at Saratoga?

19. Can you name a section of metropolitan New York City which takes its name from a sport?

20. What sports event, according to a poll of experts taken recently, was the most thrilling of modern times?

A NOVEL OF GRIDIRON COURAGE

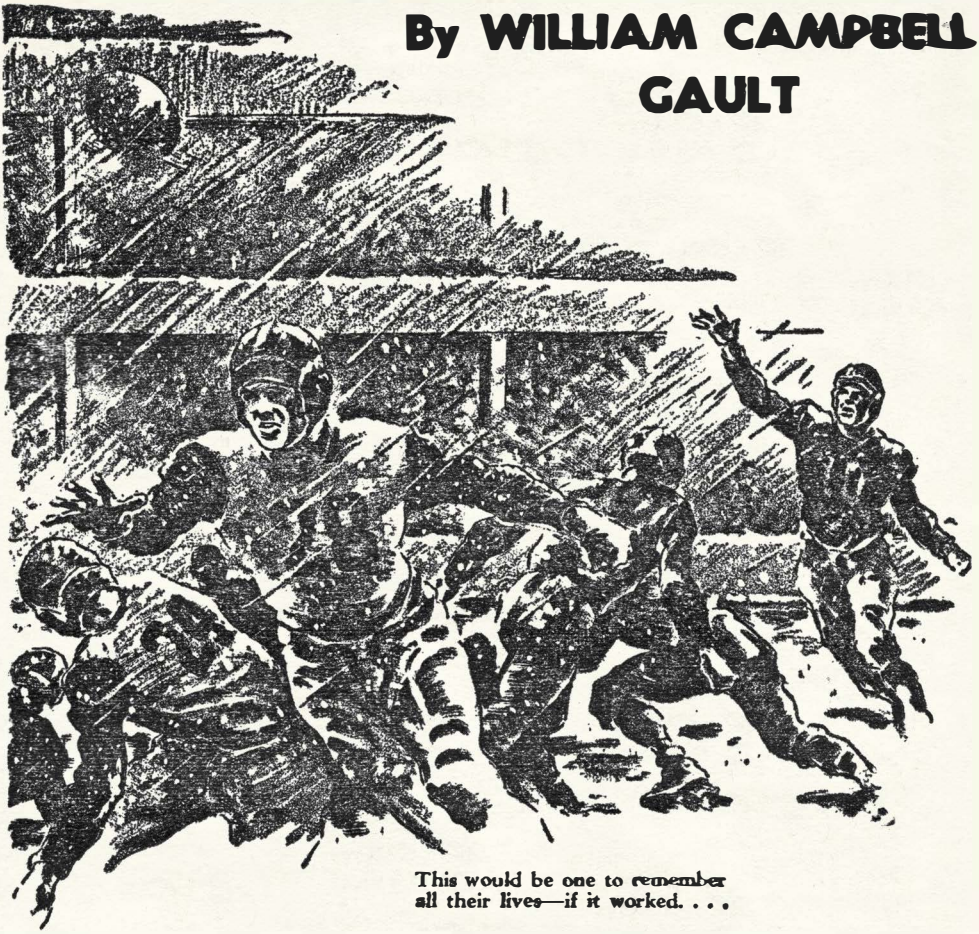
White Line Raider

THE PRACTICE field was like rock, and the sun was hotly white in the cloudless sky. It was too hot for any sport but swimming, and the Old Man had them scrimmaging. He was out for the title this year; he wanted to get the lard off them, and early.

This was August, and they had an exhibition game coming up in ten days. August, and Jeff had turned thirty-one the day before, and he knew he never should have signed again this season.

If he hadn't signed, what would he be doing, now? What did he know, besides football? Once off the gridiron, he was just another unskilled laborer.

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT



This would be one to remember all their lives—if it worked. . . .

Ten years he'd given the Cougars, and five of them had been All-Conference years. The greatest end in the game, they'd called him, for five of those years. Hutson was better offensively, but Jeff was a sixty-minute end. In a day of specialists, of the platoon system, Jeff Craig was the last of the iron men.

Indestructible Jeff Craig, they called him. Just words. Time can destroy anything.

The reserves were on the regulars' thirty, now, and it was the new breakaway rookie, Chip Koski, in the slot. A little guy, by pro standards, but wide as a barn and with legs like fence posts.

Chip was sweeping wide, and he had two men in front of him, angling toward Jeff's end. Nelsen, the tackle, went charging in, messing up the interference, and Jeff caught the rookie back after a yard's advance.

Nelsen patted his back and said, "Still some life in the old frame, right?"

Ten fighting never-guys had used up Jeff's life, sixty smashing minutes at a time—till there was nothing left but one last hopeless scrimmage—one last down—and the biggest goal to go!

"A little," Jeff agreed. "You make it easy for me, Lars."

The big Swede was grinning. "Sure. You notice how the Old Man's got us lined up, don't you?"

Jeff nodded. "The rookies against the veterans. He couldn't make it plainer. He sure spent money for rookies, this year."

"Yup," Nelsen said, "he sure as hell did. I should have bought a farm. When I had the money."

For eight of the ten years, Lars had played tackle to Jeff's end. That had been a side of the line to avoid, until last year. Last year, the Cougars had lost nine and won three, the worst year in their history. The Old Man had gone out with his checkbook after that.

Keats went back to fling one, and it was to the flat. Jeff went over to cover. Keats had been the greatest collegiate passer in the country, last year, and the Old Man had paid plenty for him.

Keats' pass was flat and hard to the rookie end, Revere. They'd gone to school together, those two, and Revere had helped to establish the other's record.

Revere was out there waiting for the pass as Jeff raced over. Revere went up with Jeff and the ball skittered off his fingertips, and they went down together.

Jeff said, "Go out and cut back on that one. You've got to learn how to fake in this league, Revere."

"I learned how to fake when I was fourteen," Revere said, and went back to the huddle.

Jeff smiled, without malice. He'd been a rookie, himself, ten years ago, and full of dreams.

It was Koski again, and this time the stocky speed merchant was making like a fullback—straight for the center of the line, those bulky legs digging, head down, knees high.

There was a hole, suddenly, and Koski was through it, and now he straightened, as he came into the secondary, the tertiary, moving like lightning, dodging, twisting.

And now he was clear, and going away, all the way to pay dirt.

Lars stood next to Jeff, and said, "A sweetheart. From a cow college, and nobody but the Old Man would have picked him. But a real sweetheart."

"The class of the bunch," Jeff agreed, and then paid him the highest compliment in his vocabulary. "A *pro.*"

Lars looked at the rookie's legs and hips, and nodded. "A pro." He sighed. "But that Keats. He's cheese, I think, Jeff. He's just a guy with clippings. It was Revere who made him great."

"Maybe not," Jeff said. "They said Britten made Grange great, too, but Grange did all right with the Bears."

Lars laughed wearily. "Grange, boy! This Keats is no Grange. If you're looking for a Grange, take a look at Koski."

Koski was coming back up the field, trying not to look smug, trying to look modest, but it was hard work. Revere clapped him on the back, and the other rookies all had a word for him.

From the sidelines, the Old Man boomed, "That's enough for today. Skull session after your shower."

"Time and a half for overtime," Lars said to Jeff. "How did we get into this racket, kid?"

Jeff could have said, *The Cougars were born when I was, in 1918. The Cougars were for me, since I was thirteen.* But what he said was, "You tell me. It's a short and rocky life. We must be simple."

HE TOOK a hot shower and felt the weariness settling in his bones. He listened to the chatter of the rookies, and his mind went back over the years, and he tried to remember when the weariness had started. Forty-seven had been a fair year. Last year it must have been that the other teams found the weak-

ness on his side of the line. Last year, he'd played with a bad knee, most of the season.

He looked down at the scar on his knee, now, and wondered if the operation had been completely successful. Cartilage operations were unheard of in the early days; but since the war there'd been a lot of them. And some had been successful.

He dressed slowly, and was one of the last to enter the lecture room. There was a vacant seat next to Lars, and he took it.

The Old Man was up near the blackboard. He wasn't old, really, but he'd run the Cougars since they were born, after a year at Notre Dame. He'd played, those first few years, those years when they passed the hat after each game. He'd grown with the Cougars.

He was nearly six and a half feet tall, and broad as a bus. He had iron-gray hair and cold blue eyes, and they said he was the hardest coach in the world to satisfy. They said he had no heart. Jeff knew his heart was the Cougars. Jeff knew him as well as anybody in the world, and respected him.

The Old Man's eyes moved around the room, and there was silence. He said, "Last year was the most humiliating year in the Cougars' history. There'll never be another one like that. I'll take the blame for it. I was trying to save money, last year. I didn't save any this year." He paused. "Every job is wide open."

Lars nudged Jeff.

Now the Old Man was looking straight at Revere. "When one of these old-timers offers you rookies advice—take it! There's plenty you've got to learn that you never learned at dear old Rutgers. I like the spirit, so far. Spirit isn't going to be enough, though. I'll have to cut this squad, when the time comes, and results will determine who goes. Remember this, as I said before—every job is wide open."

The rest was a chalk talk, devoted to the mistakes of the afternoon's scrimmage. The Old Man spared no feelings; his tongue was a lash and his voice was heavy with scorn.

When they went out, Koski was walking with Lars and Jeff. Koski said, "He's sure tough, isn't he? I like a coach like that."

"He's tough enough," Lars agreed. "But you don't have to worry if you deliver."

"This is a tough league to deliver in," Koski said quietly. "This is the cream, isn't it?"

"We think so," Jeff said, "but maybe we're prejudiced. Don't worry about it, kid. You've got all a back needs, in any league."

Koski blushed.

The heat stayed with them through the week, and into the next. Jeff was down to the lowest weight of his professional career, and there were lines of fatigue on his drawn face.

Keats' passes began to connect against the veterans and Revere was fast enough to convert some of them into additional yardage.

The last part of August, they played the Eagles in an exhibition game. The Eagles had been champs the year before, and they were stronger, if anything, this year.

The Cougars opened with a veteran line and two veteran backs. The rookies were Keats and Koski. The Eagles won the toss and elected to receive.

The field was hard, the still air hot and humid. Bull Krause's kick was long, going into the end zone, but Teller, the new Eagle flash, decided to run it out.

He had three men in front of him when he hit the ten-yard line. He had no men in front of him when he hit the fifteen. He hit the fifteen with his nose.

Jeff got up, and Nels was there to help him. Nels said, "These rookies— He could have had it on the twenty."

"He's young and full of beans," Jeff

said thoughtfully. "Like we used to be."

First and ten on the fifteen, and the Eagle quarter pulled a quick kick.

Keats had been playing deep, but not deep enough. The ball bounced ten yards behind him and rolled, and rolled, and rolled. . . .

The Eagles were moving downfield fast, hoping to make a break out of this. Three of them were converging on Keats when he picked it up.

The ball squirted from his hands as the first man hit him.

Eagles' ball, first and ten on the Cougar forty.

"They all want to be stars," Nelsen said. "I wish the Old Man would send Evans in."

Evans was the first-string quarter, and had been for seven years.

The Old Man didn't send him in. As the game wore on, more of the rookies came in, and the veterans came out. Revere came in for Joyce. Wilson came in for Jeff. This was an exhibition game, and the Cougar rookies needed league seasoning. This wouldn't count in the standings.

Jeff and Lars and Evans sat on the bench for three quarters, while the Eagles went to town. They scored once in the second quarter, and twice in the third to make it 21-0.

Then, in four straight pass plays, Keats hit the bull's-eye each time. Those four passes netted seventy-eight yards and a touchdown. Krause went in to boot the point.

It was still 21-7, halfway through the fourth quarter, when the Eagle punter got off a short one. Koski took it on the fifty, and he was going away when he caught it.

Koski got help to the twenty, and now there was only one man left, and Keats clear to take care of him.

The block Keats threw was a sandlot try, not enough to slow the tackler. Koski went down on the seventeen.

Evans went in for Keats.

"It's about time," Lars said.

Evans sent Koski off the flank, and Koski ran with a first-quarter pace, cutting in sharply to avoid the Eagle left half, fighting his way to the nine.

Second and two, and the sub full, Malone, ran into a stone wall.

Third and two, and Evans faked to Malone, cut inside guard, and it was first and goal on the seven.

Koski again, going wide on a naked reverse, looking like the five and a half feet of class he was, running all alone into the end zone while the stadium rocked with sound.

The Old Man's eyes were gleaming as he sent Furillo in for Koski. The Old Man was waiting for Koski as he came off, and he put a hand for a second on the lad's shoulder.

Then Koski came over to sit next to Jeff.

"You're the best first-year man I ever saw," Jeff said, "and that includes Lujack."

"I'm no Lujack," Koski said. "I sure like this league, though."

"And this team," Jeff guessed.

Koski nodded. "Yeh— I — I always followed the Cougars. I saw you, in thirty-nine, your first year that was, remember? I saw you catch the pass that beat the Bears."

"In thirty-nine," Jeff said, "you were about twelve years old."

Koski nodded. "That's when I stopped growing, I guess. I began to fill out, after that." He laughed. "I filled out to a hundred and ninety. It's a good thing, or I'd be driving a truck. This is more fun, right?"

The kid was all wound up, Jeff knew. Jeff said, "This is better than driving a truck—sometimes."

Next to him, Lars said, "It's best when you can sit on the bench and watch somebody else get hurt."

"Not for me," Koski said.

"And not for Lars,' Jeff answered. "He's sour because his public hasn't seen enough of him today."

It was 21-14 when the gun went off, but the Old Man didn't look unhappy. He didn't like to look too good, not until the season opened.

2

Coffin Corner Guy

THEY tied the Cards in another exhibition, and beat the Lions. And then the Bears came to town for the league opener. It was more like football weather, now.

The Bears hadn't been too much, the year before. But they weren't going to have two mediocre teams in a row, not that outfit. Both Lars and Jeff started that game. Ten veterans started—ten veterans and Koski.

The Bears received Krause's boot and ran it out to the twenty-eight. On the first play from scrimmage, it was Gulvaney sliding off tackle, off Nelsen's tackle, and Jeff helped Lars put him down.

Lars told Gulvaney, "You're thinking of last year, boy. Jeff and I been rejuvenated."

Second and ten, and Cavendish wide, and Joyce went out to cover him. Trulack was fading, as Cavendish streaked downfield, running the legs off Joyce.

Cavendish had to come back to catch it, or it would have been a score. Joyce nailed him on the Cougar forty-five.

Revere came in for Joyce.

"This is no time for kids," Lars grumbled, "when we're playing the Bears."

First and ten on the forty-five, and Gulvaney again, two hundred and ten pounds of speed and drive, pounding towards Revere's end.

Revere slid past the blockers like a veteran, and Gulvaney went down on the forty-six. Lars looked thoughtful.

Cavendish wide again, and Revere didn't commit himself completely. He looked too much like a decoy out there.

And that's what he'd been. Trulack faded, but Trulack didn't have the ball. Gulvaney had it, and was slamming toward the spot Revere should have vacated.

Revere and Koski hit him, right over the line, and the ball went arching through the air. Four men dove.

But Krause came up with it.

The Cougars' ball on their own forty-five, and Keats came trotting out. Evans walked off.

It was Jeff wide, for the decoy. It was Keats faking to Koski, and going back, back, back.

Jeff went straight downfield, and two men were covering him. On the other end of the Cougar line, Revere went wide and cut back.

Revere was alone when he caught it, and alone when he went over into paydirt. The fans went crazy.

Krause made it 7-0.

Then the Bears started to come back, and they were the rock 'em, sock 'em, prewar Bears. They started on the twenty and pounded to the forty-five on straight line plays, three and four yards at a time. It was power football, dull to the eye and murder on the defense.

Jeff began to feel his thirty-one years. He caught a knee in the ribs, and a cleat along the back of his hand that drew blood. His knee was holding up, but he still favored it a little.

The Bears ground on—to the midfield stripe, to the Cougar forty, to the twenty-seven. Two line plays here netted two yards.

Then Trulack was fading again, and Cavendish was out there, in Koski's zone. Cavendish was nearly a foot taller than

Koski, and he had to reach to get the pass.

Koski nailed him, but on the nine-yard line.

Furillo came in for Koski, and it was Gulvaney again, sliding off the tackle. Lars hit him low and Jeff high. Gulvaney took his time getting up.

Second and nine to pay dirt, and Trulack fading, and Cavendish on the flat.

Revere went up with Cavendish, and the ball bobbled for a second on Revere's fingertips—then fell to the ground.

Third and nine, and Trulack running, for a change. Gulvaney in front of him and Roestler, angling for Jeff's end. Lars came in to help, and Jeff got a piece of Trulack, just before the lights went out.

Lars was looking down at him when he came to, and Lars asked, "What hurts, kid?"

"Just winded," Jeff lied. He'd been cold; that had been one of Trulack's hard charging knees to the jaw.

Jeff got up. His vision was fuzzy, and he walked carefully, so he wouldn't wobble. The ball was still on the nine-yard line.

The trainer, who'd been coming out, went back to the sideline, and the official time-in signal came, and it was fourth and nine for the mighty Bears. And how long could they be stopped?

It was a place kick, Gulvaney kicking. It was perfect.

Cougars—7. Bears—3.

Wilson came in for Jeff, and Jeff trotted off, though it took all the moxie he had to make it. The Old Man was waiting for him. He said gently, "You play a lot of ball, son, considering your age."

Jeff winked at him and started to go by, but the Old Man's hand still rested on his shoulder. "Just this year, Jeff, that's all I'm asking of you. I need you plenty, this year."

And that was it. Just this year, and then what? Bouncer at a dance hall? Driving a beer truck? For ten years the Cougars had been his life, and before that they'd been his dream.

HE WENT back to the bench and sat next to Evans and Koski. He saw Keats master-mind the Cougars to the forty, the fifty, to the Bear thirty-eight.

Thene Revere and Wilson were going down and Keats was going back, and the pass went sailing for Revere. But Gulvaney went up with him, and came down running.

The interference was impromptu but effective. Gulvaney went eighty-four yards to six points.

And he added the point that made it Bears—10, Cougars—7.

Koski said, "Those Bears are *always* the team to beat, aren't they?"

Jeff nodded. How many Bear-Cougar games had he seen, and how many had he played in?

The call came for Koski, and he went in to replace Furillo. Evans went in for Keats. Jeff sat on the bench, thinking back, watching only a part of this, thinking back so he wouldn't have to think ahead.

There'd been nothing else in his life, no other sports, no interest but the Cougars. They were his life, just as they were the Old Man's, and they were enough to make it a full life. *Just one more year. . . .*

Evans took the kick-off, and it looked for a moment as if he might go all the way. But Trulack nailed him on the midfield stripe, and Evans went down with a thump.

It was Koski, on the first play from scrimmage. Koski, who was all Cougar, just as Jeff had always been, running wide around the Bear left end. With Koski it was a personal business, beating the Bears.

Krause's rolling block got him past the

line, and Evans took out Gulvaney. There was only Trulack left, as Koski hit the thirty, and Trulack was playing him toward the sideline, making no mistakes.

A yard short of the sideline, Koski cut back. Jeff wouldn't have believed it if he hadn't seen it. Koski cut back without any loss of pace, and ran smack into Trulack. He not only ran into him; he ran over him, and there was nobody in his way any more.

Like the Nag, Jeff thought, *like Hinkle,* and stood with the rest, shouting Koski's name.

Krause made it 14-10, and that was the score at the half.

The second half, Jeff was back in there as soon as the Bears got the ball. It was murder. The Bears were like a frustrated herd of elephants, pounding toward the goal, stringing together four first downs in a row to the Cougar twenty-seven.

Two line plays, and Trulack was fading, and there were three eligible receivers down the left side of the field. Trulack picked the farthest one, and it was the Bears on top again.

Gulvaney made it 17-14.

Koski ran the kick-off out to the thirty-seven, and Keats started to pitch. Revere caught one on the fifty, and it was first and ten again.

Then Jeff went wide, and cut back, on the buttonhook, turned—and saw Keats' pass sail into Trulack's waiting hands. Trulack made nine yards from there, and was nailed.

Keats called time out.

Keats said to Jeff, "Where the hell were you, on that one?"

"I was where I was supposed to be," Jeff said quietly. "But that isn't where the ball was."

Lars said, "Look, rookie, don't let your publicity go to your head. You're the quarter, but the Old Man's running this team."

"On the field, I'm running it," Keats said. "Vets or not, get it. That's all."

Lars was smiling. "Should I squash him? Or do you want to, Jeff?"

Koski said, "What are we fighting about? The Bears will give us all the fight we can handle."

"That's right," Jeff agreed, and saw Revere nodding, along with the others.

Evans came in for Keats, and Revere came over to stand next to Jeff. Revere said, "We're with you. I'm sorry about that—that time on the practice field. I'm learning, but Keats—well, he was a pretty big wheel at college."

"He'll learn," Jeff said. "He's too much football player to spoil. We sure as hell can use him."

"He can throw that ball," Revere agreed. "But I've met smarter quarters, in my time."

Jeff looked over to see the Old Man talking to Keats on the sidelines. There wasn't anything the Old Man missed.

Then the Bears were lining up, and the Bear advance got under way again. It traveled, in short punches, to the Cougar thirty-five, and Trulack decided to concentrate on Lars and Jeff. They were the old men, and Lars had been in all the time.

In three downs they'd gained a yard, and Gulvaney went back to boot one. Jeff felt as if he'd been run through a cement mixer. Lars had a bloody cheek, and a wild gleam in his pale blue eyes.

Gulvaney was going to try a field goal, it looked like, now.

It didn't seem too smart, with a 17-14 score, and Gulvaney was overplaying it a little.

The ball came back to Gulvaney, and he was fading, he was going to toss one. He was still fading when Lars hit him, on the forty-eight.

Cougars' ball, and the Bear line was like stone. In three plays, they gained five yards. Krause's kick went out on the Bear twelve.

And again the Bears started back with the power stuff, slamming at Jeff and Lars, remembering last year. But last year Jeff had had a trick knee, and Lars had carried most of the load alone.

The Bears fought to midfield, and then Trulack was back, with a third and seven, and there were Bears all over the field. Trulack's arm was back when Jeff hit him.

Fourth and nineteen, and Gulvaney tried for the coffin corner. Koski caught it on the eighteen and Koski started upfield.

Evans threw the early key block that got Koski to the forty, but there were three Bears who hit him there.

Jeff felt a hundred years old, and next to him, Lars was looking weary. Lars said, "How much more time?"

"Enough," Jeff said. "Enough, I hope."

But there wasn't enough. It was 17-14 at the gun, and the Cougars had lost their first game, to the Bears. Just as they had the season before.

3

Last Down for Glory!

THE OLD MAN was grim. Losing to the Bears was like losing an arm, to him. Jeff was half dressed, after his shower, when the Old Man called him in.

"I'm benching Keats," he said. "He gets out of line once more, I'm asking for waivers on him."

"You'll never get waivers on him," Jeff said. "Every team in the league would holler for him."

The Old Man nodded, agreeing. Then he looked up thoughtfully. "Those Bears are better, this year, right?"

"They're the best in the league," Jeff said, "next to us." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Let me talk to Keats. Maybe I can make him see the light."

"Not right away," the Old Man said. "Let him simmer for a while."

They went out to the coast, next week, to play the Rams. It was ninety in L.A., and the Rams were used to it. The Cougars weren't.

Porterfield threw a first-quarter pass that traveled sixty yards and put the Rams in front. For the rest of the half, the Rams played it cagey.

Keats was on the bench, silent and proud, and it was a bad day for that. The Cougars ran themselves into nervous prostration in that sticky air.

Keats was still on the bench when the second half opened, and Evans decided to fling a couple. He completed two out of three, which was enough to land them on the Ram thirty-two.

Koski went swinging wide around Jeff's end, and Jeff got him past the line. Evans took care of Porterfield, and Koski went all the way to the twelve before Washbourn hit him.

Going back to line up, Evans asked Jeff, "You feeling lucky?"

"What can we lose?" Jeff said.

The buttonhook, again, and Evans knew where to throw it, and Jeff knew what to do with it, and it was six points for the Cougars.

Lars said, "Shades of Hutson. I'm proud you're my boy."

Krause tied it up, in his automatic way.

Keats still sat on the bench.

But in the fourth quarter, Koski went fifty-three yards to a score, and that was all they needed, as it turned out.

They went down to play the Cards, and that was Krause's day. Krause looked like a younger edition of himself, that day, and it was 35-14, Cougars on top, at the gun.

They beat the Eagles and the Steelers, and out in L.A. the heat and the Rams beat the Bears, 7-3.

So it was like the old days, the Cougars and the Packers, and that should have made the Old Man happy, but he didn't look happy. Because they still had the Bears to meet, in a return game, and the Bears were best when the chips were down.

The lowly Lions were a new team this year. At least for three quarters, they were a new team, and held the Cougars scoreless. It was a bruising game, and Jeff was gone, all gone by the start of the fourth quarter. Wilson came in for him, and Evans started to pitch strikes.

On the bench, Keats was staring straight ahead as Jeff sat down next to him.

Jeff said, "The Old Man sure needs you out there."

"All he has to do is say so," Keats said. "I'm not on strike."

"It'd be better if you said so," Jeff told him. "The Old Man would like that. That college ball has made you cynical, boy. Go on over and tell him you'd like to win him a ball game."

"That's for the movies," Keats said. "Me tell *him*—?"

"You don't know him," Jeff said. "Nobody here knows him like I do. Take my word for it."

Keats' smile was without humor, but it had been a lonely month for Keats. He stood up. He said, "I'll tell him it was your idea," and walked down in front of the bench, toward the Old Man.

Then he was trotting out onto the field, and Jeff felt younger, felt no more than fifty. Just so the Cougars won, it didn't matter how it was done.

The Old Man looked down the bench toward Jeff, and away. He was smiling.

In fifteen playing minutes, the Cougars had the ball for about half the time. In those eight minutes, Keats completed three touchdown passes, two to Revere and one to Wilson.

Wilson was looking better with every game. Wilson would be holding down Jeff's job, next year.

There was a wind from the north, and the cold made Jeff's knee throb. Evans came over to sit next to Jeff, shrugging into his heavy parka.

"Well," Evans said, "Papa always wanted me in the store with him. It'll be be nice to be warm and unbruised."

"You've got five years yet," Jeff said. *Five years . . .*

The gun went off, and it was Cougars—21, Lions—0. They were still tied for the lead with the Bears.

It was December, and they played the Bears in Chicago. Chicago was cold, this December Sunday. The Old Man was like a chained bull, and his voice was tight, and he had a good word for nobody.

They caught it from him, even the rookies, and there seemed to be no confidence in them. These Bears were rough and tough and so damned good, so fast, so alert, so smart.

And Jeff, who'd been in nineteen Bear games before this one, went around with a word here and there in the locker room, trying to crack some of the tension. This would be his last game with the Bears, or anybody, and he wanted it to be something to remember.

LARS said, "It's silly, when you think of it. We get paid either way. But how I want this one."

They sat on the benches, very few of them talking, and then the Old Man told them, "The Bears are just as nervous. And not as good." In a dry voice, he read off the starting lineups.

The Windy City, and it was certainly that. The northeast wind, coming in from the lake, hit them as they trotted out onto the frozen turf. It was a full house; they were standing in the back of the end zones and along the sidelines. This was for the title, really; the eastern half of the league had nothing this year.

Gulvaney was out there, booting them for placement, and two squads were moving up and down the field, loosening up, getting the cold out of their muscles. They looked poised and confident, but they always did; that was one of their weapons.

The Old Man said to Jeff, "I'm going to need you today, boy. And some of the others. Only you old-timers understand the Bears."

"I might have one game left," Jeff said. "I don't think there's any more than that in me."

"You shouldn't have played this year," the Old Man said, "but I'm glad you did, damned glad."

Then they were tossing the coin, and Evans won it, and elected to receive. Gulvaney chose to defend the north goal.

Jeff was keyed up enough so the weariness he'd carried this past month wasn't noticeable. He hoped it would be that way through the game, that he had enough nervous energy to make this last one a game to remember proudly. He hoped all of them had enough of what he felt to make this last Cougar team a championship team.

You shouldn't have played this year, the Old Man had said, which meant he wouldn't, for sure, next year. He put his mind from that.

The stands were quiet, now, as Gulvaney advanced, as the ball soared and began to drift toward the left sideline, a bad kick.

Furillo caught it six yards from the sideline, and cut sharply to his left, and upfield. He was nailed on the thirty-six.

Three plays later, they were on the thirty-nine, and Krause went back to boot one.

Gulvaney caught it on the twenty-one, and made twelve yards before Lars Nelsen caught him on the thirty-three. The Bears made seven yards in three plays, and Gulvaney booted one.

That was the pattern of the first quarter, three plays and a punt, with two incompleted passes for each team. Neither team was opening up. Jeff remembered what the Old Man had said about the Bears being as nervous as they were.

Then, on the second play of the second quarter, Trulack went back to pitch, and Cavendish was in the clear. Cavendish went up and the ball teetered for a moment on his fingertips. Then, as he gained control, Evans crashed him.

First and ten on the Cougar thirty-four.

Gulvaney, big as a bull, went charging off tackle, and two men hit Jeff as he closed. He went down, twisting in pain, but one desperate hand reached out to trip Gulvaney's heel as he went by.

Second and eight, and Jeff couldn't make out the pattern of this one. He shook his head to clear his vision, heard Trulack's barking voice in the cold air, saw the shift dimly, and the herd hit him.

When he got up again, he saw that the play had been stopped on the twenty-seven, three yards short of a first down. Lars was still on the ground, and the Cougar trainer was coming out.

Jeff went over to look down at Lars, and the big Swede grinned up at him. But his face was white, and his ankle was already swelling.

Kelvic came in for Lars, as Jeff and the trainer helped the big boy off the field.

"These Bears," Kelvic said. "Lars won't be the last."

Jeff said nothing. It felt strange, out there on the defense without Lars next to him.

Third and three, and the Bear T, and the Bear rookie, Jordan, cutting inside Joyce's end for the first down with a yard to spare.

First and ten on the twenty-three, and Gulvaney passing this time, passing a strike to Lund, just over the goal line.

Gulvaney kicked the point that put the Bears in front 7-0.

Koski came in and Revere and Keats. But not Wilson, not Wilson for Jeff. A few flakes of snow were drifting down, now, and Jeff could see the Old Man standing on the sideline, big as a barn and as motionless.

Koski took Gulvaney's kick and he was a ball of fire, speeding upfield on that frozen turf, outrunning his interference, going all the way to midfield before Trulack ran him out.

On the first play, Jeff was wide and Revere deep and Keats back. It was a bull's-eye to Revere, for thirty yards, for a first down on the twenty.

They were burning, now, those Cougars, and the Bears called time out.

Keats had a swollen nose. He said, "How you feeling, Chips?"

Koski grinned. "I'm hungry. I'm touchdown hungry. I'm ready to eat."

Time was in, and it was Koski, wide around Jeff's end. Jeff put his heart and all his poundage into the block he threw on Cavendish. He saw Koski racing by as he went down.

He was up in time to see Koski go over as Trulack hit him.

Krause kicked the point. Three plays, three K's, Krause, Keats and Koski, adding up to seven points, and the tie. Adding up to more than that, really, because there was fire in this outfit now.

Krause's kick almost landed in the stands behind the goal.

Bears' ball, first and ten, on the twenty, and they didn't have time for the play before the half ended.

THE pre-game tension was gone from the locker room. There wasn't much chatter, but there was confidence, there were no jitters.

The trainer was soaking Lars' ankle, over near the showers, and the Old Man was sitting down there, talking to Lars.

If I had a drink, Jeff thought, it might help, this second half. There were some rattles in his head, and his shoulder was sore, but there was no weariness in him, not yet.

Koski came over to where Jeff sat, and sat down next to him. "We're clicking, aren't we?" Koski asked. "We're one of those old Cougar teams?"

Jeff smiled. "Like you used to watch, and like I did, before that."

Koski nodded. "You— going to be with us, next year?"

Jeff shook his head.

"I— I can't figure the Cougars, without you," Koski said, embarrassed.

"It's the damnedest thing," Jeff said. "College ball is supposed to be the amateur game, but there isn't a big college in the country won't make a football cynic out of you. You got to come to the pros to be an amateur again."

"Not just to the pros," Koski protested. "To the Cougars. I wouldn't play for the

Bears for five million dollars a game."

"And Gulvaney wouldn't play with the Cougars for that," Jeff said. "It's the damnedest thing, though there are plenty of them don't feel that way."

"Like Keats," Koski said quietly. "He'd play for anybody who laid it on the line. He told me that."

"He plays a lot of ball," Jeff said, "and we need him."

When they went out again, the field was white with snow, and it was swirling down out of the northeast. The Bears would receive; they were just stadows at the other end of the field.

Jeff had played in the snow before, and against the Bears. They were a sure-footed crew, and smart enough to take advantage of the weather.

Kelvic called over, "We should have skis."

Then Krause was kicking it, and there was no time for an answer. The ball soared, disappearing into the white haze at the other end of the field.

None of the old-timers committed themselves too early. Queer things can happen in the snow; a runner can come out of nowhere on the fifty, alone and going away.

It didn't happen this time; Trulack was nailed by Revere on the eighteen-yard line. The Bear march began from there.

Slipping, at times, seemingly stalled at times, the game became a nightmare of drifting figures and confusion. The play in the line was savage, and the weariness come back to Jeff, and a sense of futility.

It was a farce, but the ball kept moving upfield, and the first downs came on schedule. The snow got worse—but not the Bears. Keats asked for time out.

They talked it over, and decided to play it close. A pass would be gambling too much in this snow, and the Bears wouldn't be gambling.

Koski and Krause came in to back up the line, and the Bear advance began to slow. It died on the thirty-three, fourth and seven.

Jeff had been kicked in the head, the second play of that series, and they all looked like ghosts to him, now; he had no sense of reality. *I really should have Wilson sent in,* he thought. *I'm weakening the team by that much, trying to be the tough guy.*

The Bears were lining up, now, and he saw the ball arch back and he went in automatically. There was a silence, and then thunder from the huddled fans, and he knew what had happened.

In the snow, with a wet ball, in the sloppy wind, Gulvaney had come through with a field goal, with three points to put the Bears ahead.

From there in the Bears played it smart, and rough. Keats gambled on a pass, and made it good, and another. Then three men hit Keats, and Evans came back in.

Jeff sucked in the cold damp air, trying to clear his brain, trying to get some moxie, to shake his sense of futility. The minutes dragged on, and they hadn't been beyond the Bear forty. This had been one of the great seasons, until today.

There were three minutes to play, and the Bears had the ball, and the Bear right end was purposely off-side, asking for a penalty.

Time was what the Bears wanted now, not yardage.

Evans refused to accept it, called time-out.

Kelvic said, "I'm no Lars, but I've stolen a ball or two in my time. If we can suck them to our end of the line, and Jeff will lay into the ball carrier—"

It was, they all agreed, their only chance.

The third play in the series, Gulvaney came drifting in, and Jeff put all he had into a belly-high tackle, and he heard Gulvaney grunt, and felt Kelvic coming in on top of him.

The others piled on.

When the pile was unpiled, all of Gulvaney's protesting couldn't change the fact that the ball was in Kelvic's hands. Kelvic got up with a cut cheek, and a grin.

Evans said, "They know every play in the bag. They know everything we can throw. What we need is a cutie." He turned to Koski. "You ever do any passing?"

"In high school," Koski said.

So it was Koski off to the right, three men in front of him, and an end sweep for sure, and all the Bears chasing him over. Only one man to the left, all alone.

That man was Jeff, and it had been Koski's idea that it be Jeff. Because Jeff was the Cougars, to Koski, and this would be one for the Cougar fans to remember all their lives. If it worked.

If it worked. Jeff was weary and his vision uncertain, and the responsibility of making this silly one make sense rested with him. He strained his eyes in the curtain of snow, and saw something that could be a football.

He felt the contact with his stiff fingers and gathered it in and ran as he'd never run before in his life, ran all the way to six points and immortality.

Evans stalled as long as he could with the extra point, tried to decoy the Bears off side, and missed the boot by twenty feet. Not that one point mattered.

There was just time for the kick-off, and Trulack caught it in the end zone and five Cougars hit him on the ten, five rookies.

THE locker room was a madhouse. They went back to the hotel and Jeff went up to the room he shared with Lars. Lars wasn't there; he'd decided alcohol was what he needed for his bad ankle. They wouldn't be leaving for home until late, and the boys were on the town.

Going back, now, would be anticlimax. He wasn't going to be with them, and share in the plans to come.

Jeff saw his grip there, next to the bed, and he lifted it to the bed and started to pack. He didn't know where, but he was going, someplace where he wouldn't have to say good-by to any of them.

It's like leaving a wife, Jeff thought. *It's like the first time I left the folks.*

That's when the Old Man walked in. He looked at the suitcase on the bed and said, "What gives? Starting early?"

Jeff looked at the bedspread. "I—well—

In the snow, with a wet ball, Gulvaney had come through. . . .

it's been ten years, you know. Well, hell, I don't know—"

The Old Man was frowning. "You were going to desert, leave the team."

"I'm through," Jeff said. "I'm washed up. I was punchy, three-quarters of that game today. You didn't expect me next year, did you?"

"Next year—?" the Old Man said. "Every year, I expect you, boy. You won't play, no. But you can scout, coach the ends, take tickets, sweep out the broadcasting booth! God, man, you can't quit —you *are* the Cougars. You've got a job as long as I live."

It was very silly, Jeff realized. It was very silly for a man of thirty-one, weighing a hundred and ninety-six pounds, a big hulk of a jerk like him, to be crying.

Gilson had gone down the middle. Jim feinted to the right.

HELL on the HOOPS

By W. H. TEMPLE

Lightning in the bucket . . . thunder on the backboard, they blazed their challenge to a world they owed a licking—the two hoop outcasts who couldn't forget that two and three add up to one—one hell-for-hardwood five!

JIM CLAY squirmed on the bench and scowled up at the clock. There were ten minutes to go, and Hadley was ahead by fourteen points.

Beside him, Lou Franchetti growled, "Take it easy, Clay. You and I won't get in for a couple minutes yet. We're outsiders, we don't belong."

"I'm new," Jim said. "A guy has to be patient."

But it was hard to feel that way. He'd

come here to play basketball, to make up for his humiliation back at Grandon. He'd gone to Grandon to play basketball because it was one of the really big teams in the country. But he hadn't gotten off the bench there. They were loaded with high-priced ex-high and prep-school stars, and most of them were there on fancy scholarships. They were temperamental and jealous and a guy like Jim Clay, a kid who was paying his own way through school, had to be a wizard to stand a chance. Jim Clay didn't exactly blame the coach or anyone else; it was the system that had beaten him. The Grandon coach had a tremendous squad to handle; it was only natural that most of his time was spent with the boys who arrived with a reputation. That was the way Grandon teams were built, and they had been great ball clubs for more than a decade.

Jim Clay had dropped out and come to Hadley, a smaller school with eight hundred students as against Grandon's ten thousand. He thought it would be different here, and certainly the squad was a lot smaller. But maybe he couldn't get off this bench either.

Jim Clay, anxious to get into action, wondered dismally if he was just a lousy basketball player.

Coach Voyle spoke up from the end of the bench. "Franchetti and Clay. Go in for Miles and Cobb."

Franchetti, his swarthy face flushed with anger, muttered, "The game's wrapped up, so they let us in."

Jim Clay raced around the floor to report. When play was halted, he dashed out on the court to take his place. A cheer went up for the departing players.

Franchetti took the pass in from outside, and handed it over to Jim Clay. He came down the floor with the ball in a low dribble, not hurrying anything, looking for the spot as his teammates drifted in toward the basket.

He passed to the right finally, then cut down the center and took a return pass in the keyhole. He went up in the air and a guard went up to stop him; but Jim had no intention of shooting. He handed the ball off to his left and the center, Gilson, was there to take the handoff and dunk the ball through the hoop.

The opposing team took the ball out and came down the court, but they were not going anywhere. And eight minutes later when the game was over, Hadley had won its opener by twenty-one points. Franchetti had made one basket with a hook shot . . . and Jim Clay had failed to score.

He went down into the locker room with the squad. He had played eight minutes; that was some consolation. Likely he'd get a letter. But he had a notion that he would never be a part of this team.

They were jovial in the dressing room. "That's the start of it," Gilson, the lanky center, said. He pounded his hands together. "How many points did you get tonight, Ed?"

He was looking at Wentworth, the right forward. "Fourteen," Wentworth said. "You got me by two baskets."

Jim's head came up sharply. The two men sounded friendly, but he caught an undercurrent in the conversation that disturbed him, a sense of a personal rivalry.

He said nothing about it; but when he was dressed and left the gym, he found Lou Franchetti waiting for him.

"Nice to talk to somebody for a change," Franchetti said. "This is my second year here. I been talking to myself until you came along."

"You want to go downtown for a soda?" Jim said. He wasn't quite sure how he felt about Franchetti.

"It won't be much fun," Franchetti said, "but maybe you should have the experience once. I had it last year. There's a place they all go, a campus hangout. It'll be mobbed. The squad will be there and the college crowd, and the towns-

people and the bobby soxers. They'll sit there and ooh and ah at Gilson and Wentworth."

"I got a notion they don't like each other," Jim Clay said.

"They hate each other's guts," Franchetti said with a mirthless laugh. "They try not to show it. But you heard Gilson ask Wentworth how many points he scored. He knew damn well he had four more points than Wentworth. Oh, we got a fine little team here at Hadley. Wait until you've been on that bench as long as I have."

"You've got a fancy hook shot," Jim said, and Franchetti laughed again, but without humor. "I practice it," Franchetti said. "Maybe once a game I get to try it out. Two-point Franchetti, they call me. What are you grinning about?"

"I just got an idea," Jim Clay said. "It'll keep for a while."

They went on downtown, and Jim found that Franchetti knew what he was talking about. Gilson and Wentworth were the heroes of the team, with the others a notch behind them. When he and Franchetti elbowed their way through the mob, no one seemed to know they had ever played in that night's contest.

"This is one of those towns," Franchetti said on the way home. "If your grandfather wasn't born here, you're a foreigner. Me, I'm a city boy, they'll never cotton to me. But you might stand a chance."

THE NEXT day Jim Clay dropped in to see Coach Voyle. He'd been impressed by Voyle's knowledge of the game in practice but the coach was a taciturn type, and it was hard to know what went on under that hard-shelled exterior.

"How are things at Grandon?" Voyle asked him. "I hear their coach has been moaning about his troubles this year."

"Yeah." Jim grinned. "He lost a guard by graduation. He's got the best freshman team the school ever had eligible for varsity play this year. I guess he does have his troubles, wondering what five to start."

"Those troubles I could use," Voyle said. "Maybe you can help us when we play Grandon. You'll know their style anyway, and some of the players. How much will they beat us by?"

The question startled Jim, but he answered bluntly, "Maybe fifteen or twenty points."

Voyle nodded. "You know that and I know it. I didn't want to play Grandon. But we won nineteen out of twenty-one last year. The Board makes up the schedule. So we get Grandon. Everybody in town including the village drunkard and halfwit figure we're going to take them. You know the Grandon story?"

Jim shook his head. The coach continued, "We used to play Grandon. But we stayed small and they went big-time. They walloped us every year and we finally quit. Then five or six years ago we got the notion we wanted to play Grandon again. We had a red-hot team that year. Grandon came down here and beat Hadley by thirty points. Now we've decided we want Grandon again. We'll get beat again—and Hadley will be looking for a new coach."

Jim Clay remonstrated, but Voyle shook his head. "There's got to be a goat. It'll be me. I'm an outsider. I married a local girl and that helps, but it won't keep my job. This town is batty on the subject, basketball crazy. I like the town, I'd like to stay here. But we haven't got the kind of team play that's needed to whip Grandon."

"That's what I dropped in to talk about," Jim said. "That Gilson-Wentworth feud. Suppose some guy on the team outscored either of them?"

"Meaning you?" Voyle asked.

"Not me," Jim said. "I'm a floor man, that's what I like, feeding somebody else.

The guy I've got in mind is Franchetti."

Voyle sat back in his chair. After a minute he chuckled. "I like that kid," he said. "But he sure got off on the wrong foot around here. He talked too big when he came, and he wasn't quite able to live up to it. He's pure poison to the team, but really a good guy."

"Just suppose," Jim said, "that he went hog-wild in a game and outscored everyone else. It might be quite a jolt."

"It's worth a try," Voyle said. "Maybe —there might even be a chance to beat Grandon. Clay, you might be a life-saver. I haven't been able to get too close to these guys, my hands have been tied. But we understand each other, we can work together. You and I may pull this thing out of the fire."

THE TEAM worked all that next week. On Friday night they had a game coming up with Tech. They were expected to beat the upstate Tech club without much trouble.

Voyle kept quiet until the squad was ready to start; then he announced the lineup. It was a shock to the squad to have Jim Clay and Franchetti in the starting lineup but there was no time to talk about it. They went out on the floor.

During the week Jim had held a couple of secret practice sessions, with Franchetti. He could make that hook shot of his with either hand, and Jim had learned his moves.

On the tap, Tech took the ball downcourt and a missed shot went over the backboard. Franchetti passed in to Clay and Jim dribbled three steps, then fired to Gilson. He took a return pass beyond the middle of the court and started down. The forwards were circling; Gilson had gone down the middle. Jim feinted to the right, then looped an overhead pass beyond his guard to Franchetti who had his back to the basket.

Lou turned and lofted the ball and it kissed down through the hoop. Two minutes later he made the identical shot and the third time he tried it he was fouled in the act. He made both free throws good and he had six points.

It was not the best basketball in the world but Hadley could afford a ragged game against Tech, and Jim Clay was controlling the ball on the offensive drives, feeding Franchetti whenever possible. The half ended with Hadley in front by fourteen points; and Franchetti had piled up the difference. Gilson had four points; Wentworth had six.

IT WAS very quiet in the locker room, except for the irrepressible Franchetti. "The boys back in Chicago should of seen me tonight," he chortled. "They—"

"You and Clay playing a personal game up there?" Gilson asked.

Jim's face was expressionless. "That hook shot has them fooled," he said. "They didn't figure out any defense that first half and they were fouling. It looked to me like the best strategy. You have any better ideas?"

"You talk like the captain," Gilson said angrily. "I thought Wentworth was captain."

"Maybe Ed has some ideas," Jim said aimiably.

But Ed Wentworth had nothing to say at the moment. The squad went back upcourt again, and Franchetti began where he had left off. A top team like Grandon would have broken up the play, but Tech lacked a guard who knew how to smother the big boy. He had twenty-six points when he finally fouled out with three minutes to go. Voyle yanked Jim then, but the game was wrapped up—and it had been a one-man scoring show for Franchetti.

The locker room was deadly silent. Jim Clay and Lou Franchetti were alone with the coach finally and Voyle said, "Well, that may start them thinking. They may

get some interesting ideas out of tonight's game."

"Come on, Jim," said Lou. "Let's go downtown."

They walked together down to the Main Street and into the campus hangout; and this time they were noticed. The chatter was suddenly stilled. Lou Franchetti grinned from ear to ear but Jim Clay had a sudden premonition that this had not been a good idea. They should have waited until things calmed down.

"Yea team!" someone yelled, but the voice was ironic. Franchetti was oblivious to it.

"Nice game," Franchetti said. "We'll do better. We'll take that fancy-pants Grandon apart."

"You and Clay," Gilson said, and someone laughed.

Franchetti paused. Clay was tugging at Franchetti's elbow but Lou was looking up at big Gilson.

"You're not sore, are you?" Franchetti said. "I sit on the bench a year and a half and watch you fight it out with Wentworth. So you get mad when I have a good night, the first one I ever have. You can't take it, is that the idea? You're sore because you don't do all the scoring. Why, you walking stepladder, for two cents I'd—"

Jim Clay saw Gilson start to swing and he got his body in the way. He took the punch on his shoulder and swung Franchetti around, and hustled him outside.

"I'm going back," Lou said. "I'll clean up on all those appleknockers. I'll—"

"You're going home," Jim Clay said. "You're going to keep that big yap shut or you never play another game at Hadley."

Franchetti opened and closed his mouth. "I guess you win," he said weakly. "If it hadn't been for you I'd have ridden that bench tonight. What do we do now?"

"We wait," Jim Clay said.

They had a workout on Monday and a game two days away. The workout was ragged and the game was worse, even though they won. Voyle switched his players in and out of the lineup. Franchetti scored eight points while he was in; Gilson and Wentworth had an even dozen apiece; but it was not a good game and the Grandon contest was coming up.

Jim Clay was walking home alone after the game when he was stopped by a young man in a car. Clay recognized the local paper's sportswriter. They chatted for a moment about the game.

"Undefeated so far," the reporter said, "and Grandon coming up next. We've got some high-scoring boys. What do you think about the Grandon game?"

Jim Clay spoke without thinking. "They'll murder us," he said. "We don't have a prayer."

The reporter drove off and Jim Clay forgot about the incident until the next afternoon when practice was over. He went down to the locker, and someone had brought in an afternoon paper. There were his remarks in cold type under big black headlines.

"So that's what you think of Hadley," Gilson said. "You might at least have kept your mouth shut. That's going to look good around town, your giving up before we even get on the court against Grandon."

"Maybe it was a mistake," Jim said. "Maybe Lou Franchetti and I should quit the team."

Ed Wentworth spoke up. "That's the first good idea I've ever heard from you."

Jim turned to him. "It may be a good idea, but I think I can speak for Lou as well as myself. We don't run away from anything."

"You said it, pal." Franchetti was standing beside him. "If any of you appleknockers has anything to say, speak your piece and I'll knock the straw out of your hair so fast—"

"Shut up," Jim Clay barked. "You're no better than they are."

Lou Franchetti looked pained. His pal had doublecrossed him, his hurt look said eloquently.

"You heard me," Clay rasped. "You had a big night because I fed you. So what did you have to do? You had to stroll downtown in public where everyone could admire you. You make me sick. You got into the same act Gilson and Wentworth have been in, posing for the local pigeons, strutting around like big shots, adding up their scores and thinking that's all there is to basketball. This is supposed to be a team game and you guys are old enough to know it."

He went out and slammed the door behind him. In the locker room there was a pained silence.

Franchetti spoke up. "I guess I've been shooting my big mouth off too much since the day I got here," he said, "telling everyone how good I was. The guy is right. The guy's terrific!"

No one answered. But when Gilson started to leave the room, Ed Wentworth said, "Wait a second, will you, Gil. I want to talk to you."

THE GAME was two days later. Grandon came to town in a luxurious bus, and there were other buses and private cars as Grandon students came in and took over the town. They were a bit lordly about it; they made it plain that the game was incidental. They were being loyal to the team but it was a minor game on the schedule of the mighty, undefeated Grandon squad.

"You can see how the local people feel," Coach Voyle said to Jim Clay. "Grandon rubs it in. They look down their noses at us. It would be some game to win. What do you know about them?"

"They've got about twelve men of equal ability," Clay said. "They move their players in and out. They play rough. They don't worry too much about fouling because they have such strong reserves. But they have no replacement for Hank Vorst."

Voyle looked discouraged. "What can you do about Vorst?"

"Hold him to twenty points if you're lucky. We can outrun him. But he'll be down there in the bucket, dropping the ball through the hoop. It'll be tough to keep him from controlling the backboards. But it's where we'll have to win this game."

"You already said we don't have a prayer."

"That's the way I felt. I felt that way right up until this morning when I saw something I didn't believe. I saw Wentworth and Franchetti and Gilson walking down the street together. Maybe it was a mirage."

"The three of them had dinner together last night at Franchetti's rooming house. Lou made spaghetti and meat balls for them."

Jim Clay stared at him. "Then maybe I was wrong," he said. "Maybe we have a chance."

He walked downtown and he saw the Grandon squad swinging along, taking in the sights, staring at the coeds. They filled the sidewalk, crowding off local people, and they were spearheaded by Hank Vorst. Vorst had shoulders like a barn door, and the top of his head was six feet eight inches from the ground. So far during the year he had averaged twenty-four points a game.

Jim watched them go by. He heard a sigh behind him and there was Gilson, who suddenly looked small alongside of Hank Vorst. Gilson was six feet four, and Hadley's biggest man.

"The guy scared me just to look at him," Gilson said. "I guess you're right, we haven't got a prayer. But I'd sure like to win this one."

"Even if you didn't score?" Jim said.

"I want to beat those guys," Gilson said, and flushed.

"Let's go see Voyle," Jim said. "I got an angle."

They talked his idea over with the coach. That was in the afternoon. At seven-thirty that night they were getting ready in the locker room. Everything was very quiet, but they could hear cheerful sounds from the Grandon squad beyond the partition.

Even Franchetti was silent. "What's the matter with you?" Jim asked. "Full of spaghetti and meatballs?"

"I'm fine," Franchetti mumbled. He didn't look fine.

Coach Voyle discussed the strategy. He tried to get them loose and relaxed; finally he led them up the stairs. They went out on the court. Five minutes later Grandon appeared in satin sweat clothes. They swarmed around their basket for the warm-up, and fifteen minutes later the starting fives had taken the floor. Jim Clay was playing one guard position and Franchetti was at left forward, Wentworth on the other wing.

Hank Vorst lazily uncoiled and won the tap easily. Grandon moved down the floor like lightning, in two long rifle-like passes. Vorst lumbered in and took a pass, reached up and dropped it cleanly through the cords.

Jim Clay took the pass in from out of bounds, and there were some boos in the stands. He did not have a friend in town after what he had said, but he was not worried about that. He dribbled down-court slowly. They didn't have the men to keep pace with the breakneck speed of the Grandson five. Their strategy, as outlined by the coach, was to slow down the play.

Up ahead of him, the Hadley players drifted in and out of shooting territory. He passed in to Wentworth but the captain, unable to shake loose, passed out again, and that was an encouraging sign, Jim thought. Wentworth hadn't tried to shoot.

Franchetti flashed into an opening and Clay fired the ball to him. Lou balanced the ball on his left palm, turned and arched the hook shot over his head. It came through, barely rippling the net, and the score was tied.

Grandon came down again. But Jim Clay's last idea was going to pay off in part, at least. Gilson was playing Vorst; and while he lacked the height and reach, he was more agile. Twice he broke up passing plays directed at Vorst and finally Vorst knocked the ball out of court.

They came down again, and Jim Clay passed to Franchetti. The hook-shot artist was over his nervousness now that he was in action. He made the shot beautifully and was fouled in the process. He added a free throw and it was 5-2 for Hadley.

Franchetti was fouled twice more by his man in the next five minutes. Then Grandon sent in a reserve, and they began to stop Lou's specialty. Voyle yanked him for a rest.

It was a tight ball game. Jim was feeding Gilson and Wentworth and they were hitting. When they missed it hurt, because Vorst was unbeatable under the backboard, recovering the ball each time. But Gilson was holding him down. When the half ended he had scored only eight points, and the Grandon team knew it was in a battle. They had a slim six-point lead.

In the locker room Jim Clay said, "I want to make a confession. I was wrong. We can beat this club."

He still didn't really think so but it might help to say it, and they were all on their toes.

Coach Voyle said, "Lou, you start the second half. I think they'll break up your hook shot but you'll be fresh, you ought to sink a couple before they do. We'll battle them all the way."

THEY went up again and out on the floor, and Lou Franchetti did himself proud. He seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, taking those passes and making the shot in one loose, graceful motion. He was fouled three times and Grandon lost an ace forward on personals. Lou got the score tied, but he was not a good defensive player; Voyle took him out then.

The game went on. Vorst broke loose from Gilson for two successive baskets. He was tiring a little and Gilson had him throttled, but Grandon held that four-point margin while the minutes ticked away. Lou Franchetti came in again for five minutes, and then left, and the four-point margin was still there.

Ed Wentworth called a time out and they sprawled on the floor. "Five minutes to go," Ed said. "Got any bright ideas, Jim?"

Jim Clay shook his head wearily.

"I got one," said Ed Wentworth. "They've been bottling us up under the hoop. I guess Gilson and I have lost a little speed. I got another idea. You stand out there and feed us. Why don't you shoot from outside? It's late in the game—it's time to take that chance."

Jim said, "It's no good. I'm a floor man."

"You're a guy that hates to shoot a basket," Ed Wentworth said. "Listen, Clay, I'm captain of this ball club. I'm ordering you to shoot. Let's go."

They started down the floor again in the old pattern. Clay moved around with the ball, looking for an opening. He halted suddenly and stood flatfooted, arching the ball up and out.

It hit the backboard, came down through the hoop, and the crowd yelled. Grandon came down fast and Vorst had the ball, but Gilson went up in the air and stole it out of his hands.

They went down again. Once more Jim Clay made a basket, and this time it tied the score. Each side was waiting for the break now, and no one got off a successful shot. Finally a running violation at midcourt gave the ball to Hadley.

Once more they came down; this time they were in the final minute. Jim hesitated outside and Wentworth yelled to him to shoot. But Jim saw that a man had moved out to cover him and Gilson was momentarily in the clear.

Jim rifled the ball; Gilson took it at the side of the basket. He went up and made the shot—and thirty seconds later the game ended with Grandon trying futilely to catch up.

Twenty minutes later Jim left the gym and started home alone. Suddenly several figures rose up out of the dark. He was surrounded by Gilson, Wentworth, Franchetti and the rest. "Come on," Franchetti said. "Come on downtown. You can't sneak home, not tonight. You're a hero, boy!"

"I'm no hero," Jim said. "I scored a lousy five points tonight."

"Anybody can score points," Gilson said. "You're a one-man team. Come on down and meet your public!"

They marched him down the street toward the bright lights of the town.

Once more they came down; this time they were in the final minute. . . .

By JOHN PRESCOTT

Sam blinked as the red light flashed.

CRAZY BLADES

"The blue line is for lightning —the red light for courage—" but Sam Callan's last blasting drive down enemy ice was for all the imperishable yesterdays of a has-been—that this night alone might match!

AT LEAST once a week Mister Andrew Jessup would come around and bother Sam Callan in the Red Birds locker room. Since Andrew Jessup was secretary and front man for the Red Birds it was not unusual that he should make these visits, but he was entirely without any technical knowledge of hockey whatsoever, and to make it more irritating it had lately seemed to Sam that Jessup was riding his tail.

However maddening this was, Sam could not bring himself to face Andrew Jessup with his suspicions; he was getting

old—comparatively—and coaching jobs with teams of the Red Birds' caliber were not to be had every day. And although he had thought many times of taking his troubles over the secretary's head, he did not know how to go about it; for in the five years he had been with the club he had never been able to learn who the owners really were.

But Sam enjoyed it there nonetheless, and he had always been willing to let well enough alone.

And here was Andrew Jessup again, working his way through the steam and moisture of the cluttered locker room, his pink face appearing moist and annoyed, and the stiff collar of his white shirt already wilted and sagging slightly about his dark print tie and the lapels of his dignified blue suit. Sam derived a measure of pleasure from his annoyance, and did not bother to stir from the bench where he was sitting in the farthest corner.

Presently Andrew Jessup stood before him, mopping his face with a folded handkerchief, and Sam Callan remained seated.

"Well," Andrew Jessup said. "Well, here you are; you certainly are hard to find. Didn't the porter tell you I was here?"

Jessup started uneasily as big, ruddy-faced Hatchet Benson, the goalie, loomed out of the mist and passed him going on up to the ice. It was plain he did not like to be in close proximity with all that bone and muscle. He shied again when Arnie Wagner and Clyde Leveroni, defense men, towered above him as they clumped by on their skates.

"Yeah, I guess he did say something about it," Sam said. "But we got a game on in a couple of minutes and I had to be in here with the boys." Sam stood up and looked around him. "Anyway, I knew you'd find me if it was important."

Jessup cleared his throat, a habit which reminded Sam of a teacher rapping for attention with her pencil.

"Well, after all, Callan, there are courtesies, you know; and since I represent the management—" he flattened against a damp locker as three of the forward linemen rammed through the aisle—"you might take the time to confer with—"

Sam reached out and tagged the passing shoulder of a long blond man with sleepy eyes. "Jigger," he said. "Jigger, watch that Delevan tonight. If he beats you on the face-off, go on in after him as fast as you can. That guy likes to think things over, but don't give him time; catch him off balance, knock him off if you have to."

The blond man named Jigger grinned lopsidedly. "Sure, Sam," he said. He pawed Jessup's shoulder as he turned away. "Hi, Andy," he said. "Howsa boy?"

Jessup brushed at the sleeve of the neat blue suit.

"Damned impertinence; who does he think he is? You ought to have better discipline down here, Callan. You ought to put that man on the carpet."

Sam raised his eyebrows slightly. "Jigger? He didn't mean anything; anyway, guys like him don't just come walking by the gate every two minutes like a subway train. He ranked tops on the sportswriters' poll last year and the year before—or didn't you know?"

Sam pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose.

"Besides," he added wryly, "it's a sign he likes you."

"Really?" Jessup said, and then he cleared his throat again. Sam looked around the room and saw that everyone had gone; he saw the lockers ajar, the limp towels and articles of clothing cast at random on the benches; he heard the quiet hissing of the steam in the shower stalls. There was something depressing about an empty locker room, but he could never place it . . . something lonely.

He was aware, presently, that Andrew

Jessup was regarding him with compressed lips and he said, "Well, I guess we won't have any more interruptions. What's on your mind?"

Then, for the first time, he saw the slender, tall young man standing patiently behind Jessup. The young man came forward at a motion of Jessup's hand, and Sam saw that he was not so slight at that, and that there seemed to be an air of capability about his angular frame and long-boned face. He was almost built like Jigger, Sam thought, except that he gave the impression of being more finely-honed.

"This is Ed Snyder," Andrew Jessup said. "I want you to give him a suit; he's going to play for us."

Jessup frowned as Sam did not extend his hand.

"Oh, so?" Sam said. He immediately disliked the young man named Snyder. It had nothing to do with the boy himself; it was simply that he could never understand why the higher-ups fancied themselves as talent scouts when a perfectly well-oiled farm system was working for them day and night. These new ones never lasted more than a week, and it was surprising that the owners had not learned their lesson.

He did not say this, but something in his expression must have conveyed the thought to Jessup, because the secretary squared his shoulders.

"You have our assurance that he's a capable man."

"You've seen him play?" Sam asked mildly. Ed Snyder developed an interest in the rusty hinge of a locker door, clearly embarrassed.

"Well—no," Jessup admitted.

"Not that it would matter," Sam added, and Jessup's pink face became darker. Snyder turned as Sam spoke to him.

"Go see Jimmy out in front somewhere—" he waved his arm in the general direction of the main door—"he'll give you a suit. I'll save you a spot on the bench." He glanced at his watch as Snyder became obscure in the mist. "Well, we'll give him a shot," he said to Jessup. "Just like all the others; well, if that's all, I got to go now. I got a game to coach."

Jessup did not say anything further until they were nearly to the door. Then the secretary stopped Sam with a gentle pressure on his arm.

"Ah, speaking of that, Callan; speaking of your coaching. I'd be more careful if I were you. After all, I'm the only contact between you and the owners—and you might say that your job depends upon my sufferance."

Sam wanted very much to take Jessup by the throat and shake him, but what Jessup said was substantially true. The trouble was that Sam's position might well have been unassailable—Jessup would not have dared to threaten him—but for one thing; his contract called for him to participate in a certain number of games himself, at his discretion, but understood to be when the heat was on and something big was at stake.

The heat was on now—the Red Birds were one down in the playoffs—and he knew the boys were beginning to wonder why he didn't take the ice. Sam knew this wondering was justifiable, but the truth was that he hadn't dared to; not since the last game in which he'd played.

The one in which he'd felt that awful breathless pain cut diagonally across the center and left lobe of his chest.

THE ARENA was crowded to capacity that night and coming up to the bench Sam could hear the strangely hollow roaring which mounted in waves to the highest seats beneath the dim, dark curving roof and then seemed to press down closely all around him. There was an almost fearsome quality to that, and yet it never failed to thrill him

deeply and make his pulse rate quicken.

He went directly to the bench and was met there by the game officials with whom he conferred briefly. The Falcons and the Red Birds had already had their warm-ups and now the roaring in the stands was succeeded by a kind of murmuring expectation; then the thunder crashed again as the teams came out and assumed position.

On the face-off at the red line Jigger did not have to heed the careful admonition given him by Sam, because Delevan of the Falcons did not succeed in getting the rubber away from him. Instead, the Red Birds' center cut the puck back into his own territory, and in so doing, threw a block into Delevan which sent him spinning across the ice. It was maybe not so good to start things like that right away, Sam was thinking, but at the same time it pleased him to know that Jigger was in that kind of mood tonight; and anyway it was what most of the crowd came to see.

Skittering back across the ice, the rubber was taken by Amelot of the Red Birds, who started up-rink to his right. Sam could already see what was going to happen; he knew this play, and how it would develop. Amelot kept going directly for the fallen Delevan and it was all happening so quickly that the Falcon center did not know he was being used as a blocker by the Red Bird wing.

But as it became apparent to the other Falcons, a kind of disorganized rush began to concentrate on that sector of the rink. The linemen came over, and the defense men edged up; it was a bad thing to do, but they did not learn exactly how bad it was until Amelot passed the puck in a long slide and Jigger, charging up center-ice, took it into the Falcon cage.

That was first blood and Sam relaxed a little and opened his coat. It was always the first part, the opening minutes, that tied him up the most. He was too intelligent to think that the first goal might mean victory, but at the same time he knew that it gave the leading squad a certain psychological edge.

After the face-off he looked around and was a little surprised to find the young man named Ed Snyder sitting beside him and watching the game intently. In the past few moments the incident in the locker room had left his mind completely, and the inoffensive boy at his side now appeared as a disagreeable reminder of it. For a few seconds, it seemed, Snyder was not aware of him, and then his head turned slowly and he smiled.

"It's pretty rough, isn't it?" he said.

"What?" Sam Callan said, and he was surprised because all the other bright young men that the front office had sent down had always been very certain they could take things in stride quite easily.

"I said it's rough; anyway, it looks that way to me."

Sam Callan looked at him carefully and

again he received the first impression of competence and well-knit body structure.

"Yes, I guess it is," he said. "Where did you play?"

Ed Snyder appeared hesitant for a moment. Then he said, "Well, I played at Northeastern; I never played pro hockey anywhere."

Sam tried to place Northeastern in his mind and didn't get very far. He had never played college hockey himself, and it was always his experience that people having much to do with professional sports were not too familiar with college activities; unless it was football, where they were always talking about this or that All-American from Michigan or Notre Dame or one of those places, and offering fabulous salaries for them.

"Well, you'll find this is different," Sam said, and that time he smiled.

Ed Snyder appeared about to make an answer, but then he didn't because at that moment there was a great sound in the arena as the Falcons tied the score. Sam snapped his head around in time to see the fading red glow above the Red Bird cage and the anger and chagrin upon the faces of the Red Bird line. They all gave embarrassed glances at the bench, and Sam tugged at the brim of his hat. Well, he thought, it was bound to happen; they had six men out there, too. But he did not feel so relaxed any more after that.

2

Red Line Rebel

THE FIRST period ended with the score stabilized at a goal apiece and after the rest down below in the locker room they came up again for the second. But it was the same thing again in that one, though tighter, and nothing happened until the third and last. Then, when they brought Jigger in, his face all white and stretched against the pain, Sam knew that everything had gone all wrong and that the backbone of the Red Bird line was broken.

"Better get him right on down below," Sam said as Jigger lay flat on the bench. The game had been halted and there was a crowd around. Jigger was trying to smile, but not doing very well. It was chilly in there, but there was sweat all over his big-boned face.

"How about a doctor first?" Ed Snyder said unexpectedly. "I mean, you can never tell about internal injuries." Sam looked at him.

"It's them ribs again," Jigger said hoarsely. "Did you see how that Delevan got me? Right in the ribs with his stick. I should have known he'd be waitin' for a chance."

Jimmy, the bent-backed porter—and trainer after a fashion—came up from the end of the bench and felt beneath Jigger's jersey.

"It's them ribs all right; they always go for his ribs." He straightened and looked at Sam. "It's all right to take him down, though; they ain't bent toward the lungs."

Sam mopped his head and sat down again when Jigger was taken below. The game resumed but nothing went right after that. It was still tied up but he could tell it was only a matter of time. He had put Gusick in with Amelot and Sherman, but Gusick never worked well with the first line because he wasn't quick enough. When he changed to the other line it was better, but then he couldn't keep that one in all the time. And they didn't have the punch that was required in that critical period.

Sam had played in Jigger's spot and he was good enough to play the quality of game that Sherman and Amelot were used to. He felt sweaty and warm and sticky when he thought of that, but now

it was too late to make up his mistake.

There were only minutes left and the Red Bird line was giving more ground all the time, when he thought of Snyder. Snyder had not said a word since Jigger had been taken down and Sam wondered if the young man felt he had overstepped himself in warning them about internal injuries. He was sitting there, knotting his big hands, and staring at the players on the ice.

"How do you feel, kid?" Sam leaned over and asked him. It might not be a smart thing to send him in, but the second line was getting worse and he knew the other line needed more than Gusick could give it. Snyder was an unknown quantity, but still—

"Me? I feel fine, I guess," Ed Snyder said, "I was just thinking; it's none of my business, I know, but I was just thinking that if they stopped trying so hard out there it might be better. I mean, they've got the pressure on them and they're trying to do what the first line ought to do."

Sam turned his head to the rink and saw the young man knew what he was talking about. He had not seen it in just that way, but he realized now that the line on the ice was in desperation trying the razzle-dazzle it had not the ability to use. It should hold and block; wear the opposition down.

Sam looked at Snyder keenly; there was much more to this boy than he had noticed before.

"I think I'll put you in," he said slowly. "I'm going to jerk that line and you go in with Amelot and Sherman."

Ed Snyder colored, and Sam knew he had said it the wrong way.

"I'm not makin' fun of you, kid. You seem to have some sense. How about it, you want to try?"

Ed Snyder nodded without speaking, and pulled his gloves on. Presently the second line came off and he joined Amelot and Sherman down near the Falcon blue line where there was going to be a face-off. It was Snyder in the circle and Sam wished it had not been that way right off; but Snyder had to learn it some time.

Then, to his surprise, Snyder made a slight feint as the puck was dropped, and scooped it back to Amelot. It was a gesture of such ease and speed that Sam blinked, and all around him in the stands he felt the quickened interest in this unknown player. There had been only a quiet curiosity and buzzing in the crowd as Snyder's name had been announced, but now the deep roar was rising as the paying customers realized that they were seeing something new. Sam was, too, but he was not sure yet what it was.

But presently there was no time for speculation because the tempo of the game increased at a dazzling rate. With the puck on his blade, Amelot circled down beyond the red line and passed it across the ice to Sherman. Sherman went deep down in behind the cage and passed it out again before he was trapped.

The rubber fled clear for Snyder until it struck the skate of Delevan, who was swarming over from guarding Amelot, and then, as he thrashed at it with his stick, Snyder slid it carefully away. The defense surged out to block the apparent threat, but did not retreat in time to prevent the goal which Snyder's lightning pass to Sherman made possible. Sam blinked again, in time with the red light above the Falcon cage, and for a moment did not hear the final horn for the thunder of the crowd.

THE SQUAD went down the runway ahead of him and Sam walked slowly trying to answer the questions of the sport scribes who were all around him. He was not alone until he had nearly reached the locker room, and then it was not for long because Andrew Jessup caught up with him before he had his hand upon the

door. Jessup's face was red and Sam wondered if it was because Jessup had been cheering the team; but he doubted it. Still, it was from elation, and Jessup's voice was triumphant.

"Well," he said. "Well, Callan, young Snyder did pretty well at that, didn't he? Sometimes we know what we're talking about up in front, after all, don't we?"

Snyder had not been in there long enough for Sam to know how good he really was, but he did not want to get technical with Jessup now. He felt a curious sense of relief and he only wanted to go away somewhere and take a rest.

"Yes," he said to Jessup. "Yes, he did pretty well. I think he might be all right. He seems to be able to play in there with Amelot and Sherman; and that's something with Jigger out of it."

Some men from the Falcon team went by into the branch corridor and Jessup did not reply until the door had closed behind them. Then he said, "Don't you think you took a chance tonight, Callan?"

"Chance?" Sam said. "It was the same game we always play. The heat's on a little, that's all."

"Yes, but don't you think you should have played yourself?"

Sam's back stiffened; he'd been afraid of this. "I don't know why. Everything went all right—" though he knew it hadn't. "I can tell more about the game from the bench than the ice."

"I don't like them that close, if you know what I mean," Jessup said. "There's a lot of money in these playoffs, and I've got to make sure we get the winner's share. We want that title, Callan."

"Well, we've even up now and our chances are as good as the Falcons," Sam said. "If Jigger's not hurt too badly he'll be all right for the last one. And you just gave me Snyder," he added subtly.

"That sounds too flimsy to me," Jessup said. "I want more assurance than that; I want that game." Andrew Jessup's voice rose sharply. "You'd better put some thought on that, Callan. Just remember where you stand."

SAM DID not like the atmosphere of hospitals and he thought sometimes the reason for that lay in the way he associated them with himself. He would very likely wind up in one some day—if they could get him to it in time. Still, it was only right that he go and visit Jigger.

Jigger was sitting on the edge of the high metal bed when Sam came into the room. It was a small room, though that might have been an illusion because of Jigger's size, and the brilliant morning sun was so bright on all the whiteness that Sam had to pause in the door for a moment before he could see clearly.

"Hello, Sam," Jigger said. "The parade grows longer."

Jigger was in his street clothes and Sam noticed for the first time that one of Jigger's eyes was black.

"You had lots of company today?" Sam asked. "I would have come sooner, but I got tied up at the arena; they're doing another quick freeze for tonight's game."

"Most of 'em been here already. Jessup too; and even that young Snyder kid. He's okay."

Sam sat down in a chair, but he could not relax in there. There was a heavy odor of antiseptic and it was too quiet. Jigger grinned.

"You ought to try this some time, Sam; it's okay." Then he added quickly, "No, I guess I didn't mean that after all." Jigger was the only one who knew.

"When you getting out?" Sam asked. "You all right now?"

"I'm checkin' out now," Jigger answered. "The doc wanted me to spend another night, but I told him I had a date. It's all right; they got me taped up like the side of a boiler. Anyway, Jessup

came in and put the heat on me. He's got me thinkin' I'm real valuable property."

"You are," Sam said. "Maybe that's why you ought to stick around here for a while. We might be able to make it."

"He said if I didn't play he'd insist on your playin'," Jigger said slowly. "He wants that title awful bad. He's tryin' to stick you, too, Sam. You ought to know that."

Sam looked out the window. He was tired and he wondered why he kept it up. Sometimes it wasn't worth it; but then again, when he thought of the kids who would go on playing whether he was there or not, and maybe under someone more partial to Jessup's point of view on things, he knew he would stay until he was canned.

"I've known it for quite a while," Sam said. "It's only a matter of time, I guess. He'll get me." Sam put his hands on his knees. "You'd better stay here, Jigger. We'll get along."

Jigger shook his head. "Nope, I'm playin'. Besides, I can't make any time with any of the dames around here; too much spit and polish." Jigger leaned forward a little. "Look, Sam, I won't play much; just so I'm there in case something happens. It ain't no good if you get in there; you know that."

"I know, but I don't like to push you, Jigger; you're carrying a load as it is. Still . . . I guess if you want to suit up it's all right. I'll start Snyder and keep you out unless things unravel. But don't expect to play much."

Jigger smiled and relaxed on his elbows. "That's all right. Just so I'm around. Say, that Snyder's nice, ain't he? The boys said he made a sap of Delevan. Any guy who does that is all right."

"Yes, he was pretty good in there; he's quick and he's got nice timing. He's about the first real good one the big wheels ever sent down."

"And he's got the feeling for it, too," Jigger said. "Like you, Sam. I mean, he can see the whole picture; he was talkin' to me for a while here and he makes the game sound simple. He's young and new, but I sort of got the idea he belonged; and the others did, too. A fella like that'd be good to have out there; someone who can see beyond the immediate play. I guess it don't make sense, but I mean he seems to play it the way you did, Sam, when you were playin'; kind of a sparkplug."

Sam smiled and looked at his hands. "I guess I haven't been much help this year, Jigger. I know how you boys feel."

"Now, Sam, I didn't mean nothin' like that at all," Jigger said quickly. "You know that. Why, hell, there ain't nothin' the boys wouldn't do for you. We'll stand by you all the way, Sam."

But Jigger had said it and there it was. It had just slipped out, but there it was.

3

Face-Off Fury

SAM COULD not remember when the arena had held a crowd like the one that was in it now. As far up as he could see, and beyond that into the screen of white light, there were people, and they were still clicking the turnstiles when the game commenced. He was happy about that, but at the same time he was depressed because it was like a tremendous grand finale to everything. It was like a great organ-voiced swan song playing for him. He was through with it now; he had made up his mind to that. Jessup was one thing, and he could put up with that; but the feeling of the boys was quite another.

He started Snyder with Amelot and Sherman and he could tell right away that there was spark in there. Jigger was sitting with him on the bench and he was

pounding one hand into the other as the rubber was dropped and the play got under way. Snyder got it from Delevan and passed it back to Amelot and Amelot fenced it back and forth with Sherman until he passed to Snyder way down deep. The young center took it around in back of the cage and sent it out again before he was bottled up. The two wings tangled with the Falcon defense and they lost the rubber; but it was spirited play and Sam knew they were fighting hard.

"It's like I said," Jigger told him in a voice of high excitement. "They never worked that way with Gusick. That Snyder's a live wire; he's keepin' right up with 'em all along."

Sam had realized that in the game last night, but he was glad that Jigger confirmed it. He was like a man setting his house in final order and he was gratified that his judgments were being well received.

"You'll have to see that he gets good treatment next year," he said to Jigger, and Jigger looked at him oddly.

The game was only minutes old when the Red Bird line got white-hot and sank two tallies in as many minutes. The play on the ice was fast and furious and the fever of it communicated itself to Sam in a way it did not always do. He could sense the high-geared feeling of the squad as Snyder sparked the play and from as far away as the bench he could see the highlights of it flicking through their eyes.

But when the other line went in, it went the other way around. At the end of the period the score was even and the game had settled down to the locked-horn tactics of two teams watching warily for the first weakening.

In the second period Sam put Jigger in and called Snyder out. He did not want to do this, but he knew that Jigger was right and that Snyder needed a rest. Snyder was wobbling when he came in and his breath whistled through his teeth; but he had a grin for Sam.

"I never thought I'd be happy to get out of a hockey game," he said between gusts of air. "But I'll just need a minute; Jigger shouldn't stay in like that."

"That's all right," Sam told him. "It takes time; most of these guys have been driving at this rate for three-four years. Get a good breather; Jigger can take care of himself for a while. He's an old hand at that."

"Yes, I know," Ed Snyder said. "But they know what's wrong with him and they'll keep going after those ribs."

Sam had known that, but he didn't realize it would make the difference that it did. The raw-boned center was not on the ice for more than thirty seconds before he tangled with Delevan in a body block on the Falcon blue line. It happened again toward center-ice and then once more with the whole front line down in front of the Red Bird cage. Jigger was too good to let them damage him further, but the tactics were taking him out of the play; and they were wearing him down.

Sam took him out with the rest of the line at the end of two minutes and put Snyder back in with the other one. Jigger sat with his chin in his hands and Sam watched carefully as the second line tried to stem the tide. The Falcon squad was here and there and everywhere, and there was something about it that reminded Sam of the steady up-surge of a river beyond its banks. The Red Bird line was pressed deeper and deeper into its own ground, and there were no more brilliant sallies forward because young Ed Snyder was dead on his feet. He hadn't yet developed the stamina the pro game demanded.

Then, with only moments left in that period, Sam put Jigger and the other line back in. That helped for a while; but he knew the Red Birds' game was ruined

when they carried Sherman off the ice with a broken ankle.

THE THIRD period was not very old before Sam realized what he had been doing. He could not be sure if there was any actual hostility among the players sitting around him, but the odd glances held more than simple curiosity; and he knew with startling clarity that they were justified.

As the stream of players came and went across the ice, each time more dazed and battered than the moment or two before, it occurred to him that he was being unfair in holding his post as he had been doing. He had thought of it as a job he enjoyed and could do well, but now it seemed that he was there only by the good graces of Jigger and those others, who were doing everything they could to help him. It was the kind of loyalty which he suddenly knew he didn't deserve, because he had done nothing to help them in return.

Sam did not look at the clock before he went downstairs, but as he left the bench he put the handling of the team into Snyder's hands. He somehow felt there would be no resentment from the squad because of this; and although young Snyder looked at him strangely he said nothing. Sam did not look back as he went down the runway at a fast walk.

When he came into the locker room there was that odd loneliness again, and the moisture; and when he opened his locker there was a smell of mold. He had not been in there in over a month and as he took out each separate article of uniform it seemed almost as though those things did not belong to him at all. Always, the donning of the uniform had been a series of automatic moves, but now he found that he had to think about each piece of it in turn.

He was nearly finished when Jimmy, the porter, came down the runway and over to the bench. His old lined face looked incredulous, and he squeezed Sam's elbow gently as Sam laced the skates on tight.

"Sam," he said. "Sam, you goin' in tonight?"

"I guess so," Sam said. "About time, don't you think?"

"I don't know—I thought you weren't supposed to play."

"Not play? My contract calls for it—this is as good a time as any. People be wondering if I've forgotten how to skate."

"Maybe, but that's not what I was thinkin' of."

Sam stood up and took the gloves off the locker shelf and closed the door. Jimmy's face was uneasy as he pulled them on.

"Jigger said somethin' to me one time," Jimmy said. "He said somethin' 'bout your not playin'."

"He did, huh? Well, he was just givin' me an alibi. The truth is, Jimmy, I'm just lazy." He slapped Jimmy's thin, twisted shoulder and clumped toward the door; Jimmy called after him.

"Maybe that's the best thing for you, Sam. Maybe you ought to be lazy more."

Sam went up the darkened runway toward the bright luminescence at the other end. There must be a time out or something, he was thinking, because the crowd was quiet. He could always tell from crowd-sounds nearly everything that was going on. But when he came to the top and went through the gate to the ice the noise of the gathered thousands came down to him in a curious, wondering sound; it came in growing volume from all sides until he could feel it almost as a physical pressure.

The men on the ice were staring at him hard as he came down to the Falcon blue line where there was going to be a face-off. Ed Snyder and Jigger met him before he came to the line. Jigger seemed to be using his stick as a kind of support, and

there was a long cut running across Snyder's forehead from the bridge of his nose.

"What're you doing out here?" Snyder asked him. "I thought you weren't supposed to play."

"I just made you boss until I got back," Sam said to him. "How come you're telling me what to do?"

"I'm not telling you; Jigger told me."

Sam looked at Jigger. "I thought you got paid to play hockey; instead I find you using club time to babble like an old woman. Worse."

"I only tell my pals," Jigger said. "My mind gets uneasy when I got a secret in it. You know how you are, Sam, with those hot tips you get on the horses. And the money it costs me. Lordy!"

An official came over and said sarcastically how about getting the game going again, and Sam sent Amelot out and took his place at right wing. Snyder took the other one and Sam wondered about that until he saw Jigger and Delevan in the circle, and the look Jigger was giving the Falcon center. Sam felt warm with the look because it meant that Jigger had a lot of fight left, and he knew they would need it. The score was still tied up at two apiece, and there were less than three minutes left in the game.

WHEN the referee dropped the rubber Jigger speared it and passed it back, and for the first time in a great long while Sam had his blade on one. It was an odd sensation, almost as though he'd never played before, and for a moment he felt like the rawest rookie, who didn't know what to do with it.

He was on the far side, near the boards, and when the Falcon line broke and came for him his legs felt old and rubbery as he fought away. He could not tell if that was from lack of condition or fatigue; but he was anxious, and he knew that some of it was due to that. All, maybe.

As the Falcon wings came in to swamp him he saw Snyder in the clear and got the puck away, and then sprinted along the boards beyond the Falcon blue line toward the nets. The defense men made token body checks and Sam went down around and reappeared on the other side. Jigger took Snyder's pass at center-ice, then slipped it into Sam at the corner of the Falcon cage. Sam cupped it until Snyder broke through the defense, then flipped it out; but Snyder's rush had been anticipated and the young center went down in a tangle with the Falcon goalie.

They came back up-ice in defense and Sam commenced to feel a little better. It was like the opening minutes sitting on the bench again. They had not made a goal, but he had met the fire of the enemy and he was battling on ground becoming more familiar by the second. The easy looseness was coming into him again. He snapped a smile at Jigger and threw a wave to the gang along the boards. They were standing up and cheering him.

Then that too-brief respite was over and the Falcon line was charging down—Delevan, Gordon and Tomacheck; the rubber was lacing across the ice in short, vicious thrusts, from stick to boards and back again. Sam and Snyder met them at the blue line and Sam went spinning in a wild twist as Delevan hit him and sent him flying. He struck the boards with a dazing impact and it was not much more than reflex that kept him from going flat.

He was groggy and the light seemed brighter as he went back into it again. The Falcons had struck with fury against a line which was tired with too much playing and crippled with injury. The battle raged around the Red Bird cage, surging and receding like ocean waves, and the blustering face of Hatchet Benson stood out like a lighthouse in the storm.

Sam stayed in it and the sticks swung like Highland claymores. He fought side

by side with Jigger and Snyder and Leveroni and Wagner and in that brief span of moments-become-hours he felt a closer identity with the team he coached than at any other time that he could remember. He took a fierce, furious joy in the struggle, and it seemed to him that something of that was in the others because he could not remember when they had fought like that before; he had never seen the defense wall so grimly determined; he had never seen Jigger's face so brutally elated.

And he had never felt so unearthly tired.

He had been tired before but it was nothing like this because this fatigue was closer to death itself. It was an agony which dragged at his arms and legs and which held his skate blades to the ice as though they were moving through sand. It was a thing which encircled his chest with a steel band; a case-hardened belt which drew inexorably tighter with each unit of energy his body consumed. His breath was shallow and quick-heaving and his chest and head seemed to swell and pain as though his furiously pumping heart were forcing all the blood in his body through the top of his skull.

He had barely the strength to stand when the attack was finally broken, and he was not conscious at all of his movement as he tried to join Snyder and Jigger in their assault upon the Falcon line.

He stopped at the red line because his legs were unwilling to carry him further. He stopped and his vision seemed to gray out slowly from the sides until he realized that in all that motion he could discern with clearness only Snyder and Jigger carrying the battle home.

Around him in the stands the deep-swelling roar rolled back and away and far on up until he stood in a deep void where there was only empty silence. The sharp, shuddering pains raced through his body and the gray-out went black. Before him there was a violent burst of red in a tunnel which had no end, but he could not be sure if it was the light above the Falcon cage because his eyes could only focus on the scarred, translucent ice coming up in a smash.

"THE TROUBLE with him is, he thinks he's indestructible," someone said. That was Jigger.

"Well, maybe I should have explained myself, but I knew it wouldn't do any good anyway," someone else said. That was Ed Snyder.

"He's got to get over those ideas," another voice remarked. "He's not so tough."

Sam tried to find the source of this last voice, which he did not recognize. It came from a man who was standing above him, and that man was wearing one of those white surgical coats that button up the side; and there was a stethescope dangling from his neck. Sam felt the softness beneath him and his nose caught the thick odor of antiseptic. It was something like the realization of a self-made prophecy to find himself in a hospital bed, but maybe he was lucky to have got there.

"Well, look, he's coming around," the man in the white coat said, and Sam saw more clearly that this man had also a

Then that too-brief respite was over and the Falcon line was charging. . . .

short mustache and that he was very tall.

"Maybe he's indestructible after all," Jigger said. Jigger looked ridiculous, sitting on another bed with the white hospital gown not quite covering his knees. He had two black eyes now and that made Sam smile; his face hurt when he did that.

"Looks like I came through as well as you did," he said. "Caved you in again, didn't they?" and Jigger nodded.

"Wait till you see your face," Jigger said. "When you hit the ice the rink cracked wide open. You've had it, Sam. But you ought to see what Eddie did to Delevan."

"Did we make it?" Sam said, and he looked around until he found Ed Snyder. Snyder was sitting on the edge of Sam's bed and he looked very neat and somehow authoritative in a tweed suit; there was a battery of pens and pencils in his breast pocket.

"By one goal," Snyder said. "It coincided with the horn."

"Yeah, we did pretty well after we got the deadwood out of the way," Jigger said offhandedly, and smiled.

"Almost dead," the doctor said drily, and he held Sam's wrist and looked at one of those sweep-hand watches. "You're lucky, Callan. You almost didn't make it. You've got an occlusion. It's rest for you, and quiet."

"That'll make Jessup happy," Sam said. "He's been waitin' for an opening." Jigger was grinning widely and Sam could not understand why.

"Jessup doesn't live here anymore," Jigger sang with a lilt.

Something made Sam look at Snyder and he saw Snyder fold his arms across his chest, half-smiling. "What he means, Sam, is that we've dispensed with Mister Jessup's services. He was interfering in too many things that he knew nothing about. I learned that at first hand."

A glimmering of something came into Sam's mind and presently it all fitted properly. "I've always wondered who was behind the Red Birds, but I could never find out," he said. "So you're it."

"I am now," Ed Snyder said. "My father owned the stock until he died recently. He held controlling interests in a good many things, but he always preferred to remain in the background, unknown; operating through front men. I knew that was wrong where the end-product of the enterprise was not something you could market like a car or a refrigerator. An owner can't be impersonal with a thing like that; he should be a part of it."

"You've been a pretty big part, if you don't mind my saying so," Sam said. "Does Jessup know?"

"No. He never knew who owned the club either; he worked through another front man. But that's all changed now." Ed Snyder colored slightly. "I just wanted to come in for a while and see how things were going; now I find I'd like to go on playing—if I'm good enough, I mean."

Sam sat up slightly. "You mean you're asking me?"

"You're still the boss as far as I'm concerned; we'll rewrite your contract for next year. Everyone knows about you now that this happened. As a matter of fact, you're a kind of national figure."

Sam lay flat and smiled. "How do you like that?"

"A glory-boy," Jigger said. "Nothing but a glory-boy. Already the dames around here are askin' about you. You, a homely thing like you."

Sam kept on smiling. Everything was fine now; he felt sleepy and languid and totally relaxed for the first time in a great while.

"Jigger," he said drowsily. "Jigger, you just be a good boy and maybe I'll fix you up. When you see one you like, just let me know. If I don't like her I'll introduce her to you."

Hard Luck Harrigan had nothing to show for all the thundering years—save that one hopeless yard that nobody else ever made—that, and a—

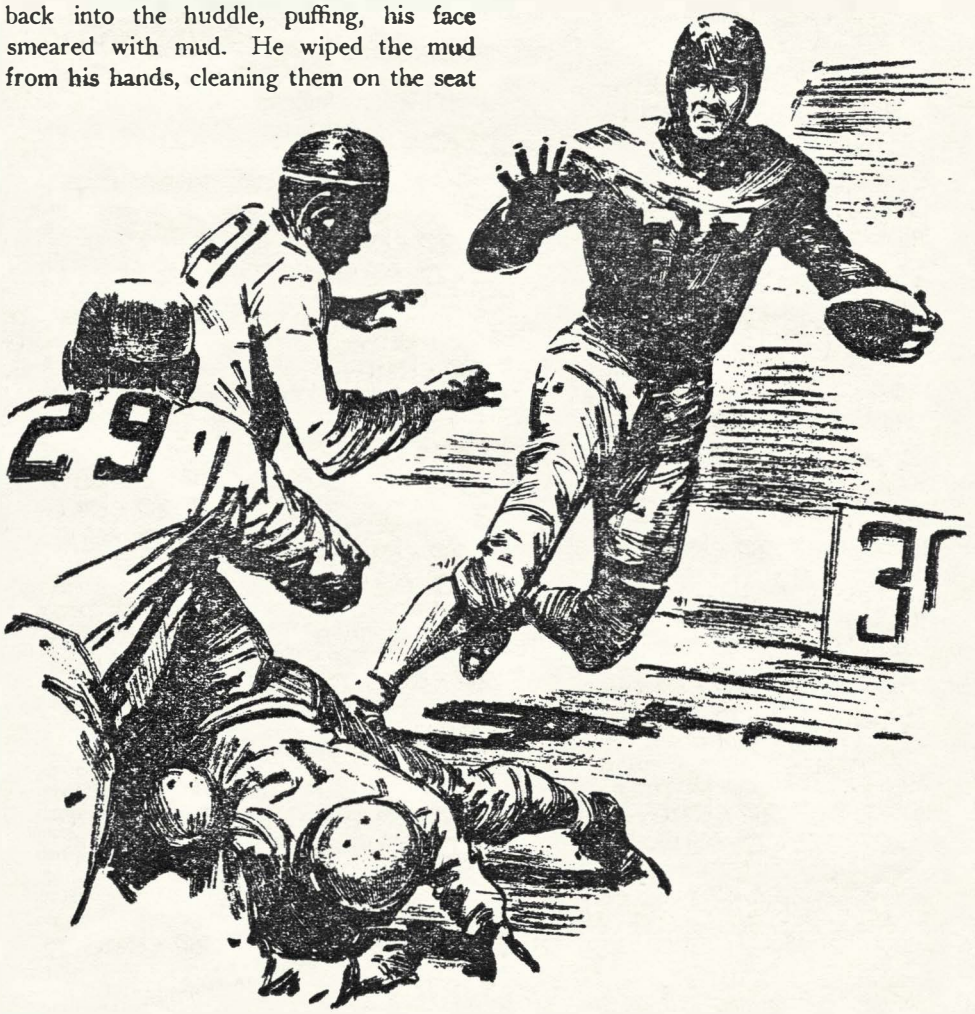
SIX-POINT HEART

By DAVID CREWE

IT WAS a sorry finish to a highly unspectacular career. There were about five thousand people in the stands, watching this drab contest down on a muddied gridiron, twenty-two muddied men slugging it out, already in this first half indistinguishable one from the other.

Matt Harrigan, Beaver fullback, came back into the huddle, puffing, his face smeared with mud. He wiped the mud from his hands, cleaning them on the seat

He tore through for six yards. . . .



of his pants, and then he bent over, holding his knees with his hands, looking down at the torn turf.

He was remembering that it had started this way, too, way back, so many years that he did not care to count them. It had been with one of those small-town high schools—not the kind that won national recognition with its football teams and went down to Florida or out to California for intersectional contests, but a little high school where there was no emphasis on football, and they lost as many as they won.

It had been raining then, too, he remembered, and he'd been a sophomore in high school, a gawky kid who wanted to play football. He'd gotten into the game and he'd fumbled the wet ball the first time he got his hands on it, thus establishing the precedent.

Quarter Ted McGill said, "We'll hit that left side, Matt. Number seven B. Watch the mud."

Matt Harrigan coughed slightly to indicate that he heard. They had about eight or ten minutes to go in this first half of the final game of the season with the next-to-last-place Mustangs. The Beavers were last in the league standings. There were five thousand in the stands, which had a seating capacity of fifty thousand. They were scattered about in the vast stretches of empty seats, and Matt Harrigan wondered vaguely why they'd come at all. It was a way of passing a wet, dismal Sunday afternoon, he supposed.

No score as yet, with the ball pushed back and forth between the two twenty-five-yard lines. The kicking was atrocious with the wet, slippery ball. Only two passes had been attempted, neither of them successful. This was a ground game, a struggle between the two lines, two big, strong, but not particularly adept lines.

It was amazing how hard they were trying, fighting it out for last place. Matt had never ceased wondering about that fact after seventeen years of football, three high school, four college, ten with the pro Beavers, the last-place Beavers. They always tried, even when there was no reason for trying.

The Beavers came out of the huddle, linemen plodding up to their positions, the backs squatting, running out of the single wing. At the shift Matt came up behind the center. He listened to McGill bark the numbers, and he wondered how many numbers he'd listened to in his career, squatting there, waiting for the ball to spin back at him, feeling the stir in his stomach.

He could even feel it now in this, his last game of football, when nothing mattered. He had butterflies in his stomach, waiting for the spinback, and he might have laughed if it hadn't been so pitiful.

Center Hank Redmond shot it back, hard and true, and Matt was off, two hundred and ten pounds of him, six feet one, still pretty fast for a man in his thirties. No. 7-B was a shot off tackle on the left side of the line, nothing spectacular about the play, just a shot at the line.

He saw Studwell and Baggett, tackle and guard, fighting feverishly to give him a hole, digging into the mud, driving forward. He had his hole for a fraction of a second, not wide enough to drive a truck through, not the kind of holes the first-place Bulls gave their runners, but a hole.

Matt plunged through, head down, legs churning. A man hit him, and then another. He rolled away from the first, but the second man had hit around the knees and he was holding.

Two more men surged up to throw him back, but the whistle was blowing fitfully and the referee brought the ball back. It was a five-yard gain. Studwell, the tackle, got up, his white teeth gleaming out of his muddied face. He said, "Nice going, Matt."

Matt nodded. He thought he heard a faint cheer from the stands, and he thought

ironically, *That must be Grace and the three boys.* They were out to every game, and two of the boys were grown up enough to be playing sandlot football themselves. Little Matt, aged four, was still rather bored by the whole thing. They usually brought some of his toys along so that he could play in the box.

IT WAS a first down on the Beaver forty-seven, the second first down in a row. They were going places!

Baggett said in the huddle, "That end can be boxed out, Ted."

McGill looked at Matt Harrigan. Matt said:

"I'll take it again."

McGill smiled at him. He was the "mudder." He was the guy who went good when the field was slow. He'd been the only consistent gainer all this afternoon.

"All yours, you big ox," McGill said. "Nine A."

It was a reverse this time with Matt taking the ball from McGill, heading out wide, and then darting in toward the line after the end was boxed out. It was a good play, and in ten years Matt had picked up plenty of yardage with it. With a good, tough line in front of him and blocking backs to run with him, he could have picked up a lot more. He could have made some of the All-Pro teams; he'd have been in line for the big dough they were handing out to pro players these days. It hadn't been his luck.

McGill took the ball from center, spun, and handed it to Matt as he went by. Starting out wide, Matt sucked the end out with him, and then Johnny Winfield, the Beaver end, smashed the Mustang end, pushing him out wide.

Matt cut in hard, leaning his weight forward, gathering momentum as he crossed the line of scrimmage. He made eight yards before they ganged up on him, slogging him down in the mud.

THERE was another faint cheer from the cold, wet spectators. This was reminiscent of his last college game, also—another inept eleven, finishing with one victory in nine games. He'd been lucky, though—as lucky as he ever got. He'd wanted to play pro football, and he'd been afraid that playing with a small-time college which was not going anywhere, and never had been anywhere, he would not be noticed.

He'd been lucky; the last-place Beavers had drafted him. They'd treated him well, and he'd never had any complaints. They paid him the most they could, considering the fact that the club, always hopelessly weak and far down in the standings, didn't draw too well, and the club owners were nearly always in the red.

Sportswriters and friends had told him that if he'd been playing with the Bulls, or one of the top pro elevens, he'd have been able to command double the pay he got now. He'd have made All-Pro teams with the proper support, and would have been in a position to dicker for the big money.

That was all under the bridge now. His luck had held true to form all the way. It had been all bad. He'd announced his retirement after this game, and he was taking a coaching job—not with one of the big colleges, not even with one of the small colleges. A prep-school job—athletic director, not too much money, but a place to live with his family.

He remembered other guys who'd gone out from the pro ranks into the coaching profession, their big reputations going before them, opening the way for the high dollar.

Only the previous Sunday afternoon, the Beavers had taken a shellacking from the second-place Trojans, and George Winslow, Trojan back, had had a "day." Winslow was leaving the game after seven years, taking a job as assistant coach at Tech, a football factory. In three years

Winslow would be head coach at Tech, pulling down money up in the twenty to thirty thousand dollar bracket.

The Trojan fans had given Winslow a new car, a bag of gold pieces, a couple of hundred dollars' worth of luggage, assorted gifts too numerous to mention. Winslow had played with a rich club, a club in the running every year, and he'd made a reputation for himself.

They'd never had a "day" for Matt Harrigan. They weren't having one now. He was going out the way he'd come in.

Ted McGill said in the huddle, "We're moving now, gang. Let's run it over."

Matt wanted to ask, "Why?" Who the hell cared, either way?

When he caried the ball, though, he was a freshman back just breaking into the game, trying to impress everybody, giving it the college try on every play; and that didn't make sense.

He hammered through center for three yards; he picked up four over left guard. He made a first down on the Mustang twenty-eight with three minutes of the half remaining, and the Mustangs called time out.

They stood around on the soggy field, and Matt noticed that the rain had stopped. It had been drizzling all morning, and raining fairly hard when the tarpaulins were dragged from the field. Now it was over, but the sky was still overcast, a gray, sodden sky, with gray men playing underneath it.

Matt wiped his face with a towel a boy brought out. He wiped the mud from his hands and he looked toward the box. He could see them watching him, Grace, his wife, and the two boys, Randy, eleven, Joe, nine. Little Matt was sitting on his mother's lap with the blanket around him. Randy waved a hand to him, and he waved back.

They deserved something more than he'd given them during his playing career, and now that it was over he still was not giving them much, not the sort of thing George Winslow would be able to give to his kids, not winters in Florida and summers up in the mountains.

Ted McGill came over. He said, "We have enough time to run this ball over, Matt?"

"I think so," Matt nodded. "They're not so tough in the middle of the line any more."

McGill laughed. "Who would be," he asked, "when they've had a battering ram smashing at them all afternoon?" He said thoughtfully, "You look tough enough to go five more years, kid."

"No, thanks," Matt said dryly. "I'm still able to walk a straight line. I still know how to add up figures."

A whistle blew and they had to go at it again, first and ten on the twenty-eight. Ted McGill sent him over right guard, and he tore through for six yards.

McGill worked a quarterback sneak for three, and then Matt took it again, off-tackle this time, and a nice hole opened up. When they dragged him down he was on the nine, and was pretty sure they were going to make that first score.

He found himself getting a little excited. He suddenly wanted to win this game very badly. It was the last game of pro football he'd ever play in his life, and he wanted to win it.

Craddock, the right half, went around the end to the six. McGill took it over guard to the four, and then Matt piled through the middle of the line to the two. They had enough time for two plays before the half was up.

McGill looked at him in the huddle. He said, "You up to it, kid?"

"Let me run it," Matt said.

There was no deception now. They were just slugging away. He took the ball from center and lunged forward. He gave it all he had; he gave it even a little more than that because that was the way he'd always played the game.

The pile-up was on the goal line, but he knew he hadn't made it.

McGill said, "Maybe an inch, maybe two. We'll just lean forward this time and we got it."

It was straight forward again this last down, goal to go. Matt squatted, shifted up behind center, and waited for the ball from Redmond. The Beaver center was a little too anxious. He wanted to get the ball back and he wanted to open a hole for Matt at the same time. Redmond seldom made a bad pass from center, but this one was bad.

Matt had to lunge to get it. He was off-balance when he started to run, and he lost a full step. It gave the Mustang forward wall plenty of time to get set. It enabled the backs to come up, and the whole team was there waiting when he came up.

He hit it with the force of a pile-driver. He felt it give, and for one moment he thought they were going over into the end zone. He kept digging desperately, head down. Hands were grabbing at his arms, shoulders, his face, muddied hands, muddy faces in front of him.

The whistle blew and he was down and they were all on top of him. He hadn't made it. McGill was saying, "Tough luck, kid."

The gun had gone off, ending the half. Matt gave the ball to the referee and he got up. Redmond came over, shaking his head.

"Sorry, Matt," he said. "It got away from me."

"Forget it," Matt said. "You haven't made a bum pass in four years."

THEY walked off the field, eleven muddied men, and went into the dressing room. Matt Harrigan stripped off his jersey. He washed the mud from his face, his hands and his neck, and put on a clean jersey. He sat on his stool, looking around, listening to the hum of low, deep-voiced talk in the room.

McGill came over and leaned against the locker. He said thoughtfully, "So it's the last one, Matt."

"Ten years is long enough for anyone," Matt said.

"Any regrets?" the quarterback asked him.

Matt looked at him. "I'd probably do the same thing over again," he reflected. "When you have football in the blood you just don't get it out." He didn't want to say to McGill that he wished he had it to do over again with a good club, not this poor man's eleven, but he couldn't say that to McGill because the quarterback would be playing next fall with the Beavers, and he'd still be hoping.

McGill said, "A guy like you would have really gone places with the Bulls or the Trojans. We never had the line to spring you loose, Matt. You'd have been right up there with the big guys as a ground-gainer and high-scorer, and year after year. I know. I've played with three different outfits in this league."

"Thanks," Matt smiled. "I'll say this about the Beavers, they've done the best they could for me every year. I've never had any complaints."

The Beaver coach, Ed Freeman, came over, a heavy man with spectacles. He said, "You looked like a kid out there, Matt. You got enough drive for a rookie."

"Thanks," Matt said.

"So next year," Freeman murmured, "I look for another fullback. This is tough on me, kid."

"Somebody will turn up," Matt told him.

Freeman smiled wryly. "Not for the money the Beavers are paying," he said. "We just can't touch the guys with the big names. We're lucky when a guy like you comes along from one of the small colleges. How often does that happen?"

It happened just once to me, Matt Harrigan thought, *and that was enough.*

"You pretty well fixed at that prep school?" Freeman asked him.

"I'll get along," Matt said. "I get free living quarters with the job."

Freeman grinned a little. "I was thinking," he said, "if you ever need an assistant coach out there you might drop me a line, Matt. My contract runs out with the Beavers next year. I think I'll be out on a limb."

Matt laughed. Freeman was another guy who had never gotten a break. Freeman knew football, but he couldn't turn out great teams with poor material. He'd been handicapped for years with the Beavers, doing the best he could with mediocre players.

It was getting cold when they went back on the field. It was cold and raw, with a wind coming up. Matt took off his sheepskin coat at the bench and walked out on the field. It would have been nice to have a warm, sunny day on which to bow out, with fifty thousand loyal fans in the stands, cheering him as he trotted from the field for the last time. That would have been something to remember. He wondered if any of these chilled fans on the wet seats realized that he was winding up his career. There had been a small note on the papers. That was all. Just another guy hanging up his cleats for the last time.

McGill said, "Well, we'll finish them up this half."

Matt picked up where he'd left off the first half. It was the same slugging match. The Beavers took the ball on their own twenty and marched up the field, getting the yardage in driblets—two, and three and four.

He could feel it more when he was knocked down now. The cold did that. He took somebody's knee just above the right eye when he bored through the middle, and he nearly went out. They had to call time for him as he lay on the soggy turf.

McGill said, "You all right? You want a rest?"

"After the game," Matt muttered. He sat up, shook his head, and got to his feet like a big dog.

They moved forward again, and they lost the ball on a fumble on the Mustang twenty-two. It was disheartening. Brigham fumbled going through tackle, the ball squirting out of his hands as he was hit.

Matt, running with him, lunged for the ball, got his hands on it only to have it slip away. He lay on his stomach in the mud, staring at the loose ball just before a Mustang player fell on it.

The ball had been just beyond his reach, the way everything else had been in his life—just beyond his reach. He felt like crying. Redmond, the center, slapped his back and gave him a lift to his feet. Redmond said, "We'll get 'em, Matt."

It was still no score at the end of the third quarter when they changed goals. The sky seemed to be getting lighter, the way it did sometimes in late afternoon after rain. And it was getting much colder.

Matt blew on his hands in the huddle on the Beaver thirty-eight. They were ready to go again, ready to do or die, and for nothing.

"It's a long pull," McGill said. "We can make it."

He gave Matt the ball over right guard. Matt tore through for five yards, and they were on their way. They worked it down to the Mustang thirty-four, and they were stopped by a determined stand of the Mustang line.

McGill tried a short pass, and the pass was intercepted on the Mustang twenty-five. The Mustangs immediately kicked up the field, a quick kick, catching McGill, at safety, by surprise. The ball rolled back to the Beaver fifteen.

Matt wanted to laugh, but his body hurt too much. He looked at the faces of the other ten men in the huddle down on

the fifteen. McGill said, "We'll play it for the breaks. We rate a break now."

That was wrong, Matt knew. No one rated a break, ever. Some guys got all the breaks and some guys got none. That was the way it went. There was no such thing as an even distribution of luck.

They didn't have too much time now, and it was a long way to the Mustang goal line. McGill said, "This is Harrigan's last game, gang. He wants to go out with a smile on his face. That right, Matt?"

"That's right," Matt said gruffly.

"Let's move it," McGill said.

THE LINE worked a little harder. They put something extra into it, and they gave him bigger holes to go through. He suddenly realized that they were playing this game for him. He could see it in their faces in the huddles. It was apparent in the way they blocked for him when he carried the ball, always giving it something extra. It was a nice thing. It was like a parting present.

They reached the fifty-yard line, and they called a halt. There were seven or eight minutes of the game left, plenty of time to run it the rest of the distance.

McGill said, "Fifty yards and then you're through, Matt. They say the last fifty is the hardest, kid." He was grinning as he spoke, and he slapped Matt's broad back. He said, "We're going to miss you in these games when the chips are down."

"Stop kidding," Matt growled. "You'll have a young guy here next fall, a guy who won't fall over his own feet going through."

He looked toward the box again and saw his family. The two boys were watching him intently, realizing, maybe, that this was the last time they'd ever see him in action. From now on they'd have only memories of their father as a football player. He wanted very much to make this last impression good.

McGill gave him the ball on the off-tackle slant, and he piled through, head low. They knocked him off his feet, but he got up and kept going for nine yards. Again that faint cheer from the stands.

They moved down the field slowly, Matt doing most of the ball carrying now. He was cold and wet and very tired, but he kept going, adding one yard to another, drawing closer and closer to the Mustang goal line.

On the thirty-two they stalled for a moment, but Matt piled through for two yards and a first down, and they were off again. They got down to the fifteen.

McGill said, "We're saving this touchdown for you, Harrigan. It's all yours."

They lost ground on a penalty and picked it up again when Matt hurtled through for twelve yards. But time was beginning to run out now, and they were on the Mustang eighteen.

Matt said quietly, "Give me that Nine A, Ted."

"All yours," McGill smiled.

Nine A was one of the off-tackle shots, a play to spring a man loose. They used it often when they were in pay dirt.

They came out of the huddle and Matt Harrigan was thinking, *This is it. This is what the kids will remember.*

He came up behind Redmond on the shift, and he waited for the spinback. He saw Redmond looking back at him through his legs, grinning a little. McGill was barking the numbers. The Beaver line waited, tense, ready.

The ball spun back hard and true. Matt took it, spun and faked to Brigham, sliding by. He cut for the hole in the left tackle spot, and it was big—the biggest hole he'd had all afternoon.

The Beaver line was surging forward, sifting through to go after the Mustang line backers. And there was a whistle on the play. Matt Harrigan heard it very clearly as he caught the ball and started to run with it.

There was no stopping now. He tore

through the hole, swerved away from a tackler, leaped over two men who were in the mud ahead of him, a Beaver blocker and a Mustang back. The goal line was a dozen yards away. He took off, summoning the last bit of strength in his body. He kept driving forward.

A man bounced off him. He remembered side-arming another tackler, veering off toward the corner of the field, running, running hard, running into oblivion.

A Mustang player was angling at him, trying to run him out of bounds before he went over the last line. Matt Harrigan changed his direction, heading straight for the man, driving into him.

They tumbled over the line together, and Matt felt his ankle go, not a break, a kind of twist, but enough to put him out of action for a month or so.

He lay in the end zone, the ball tight against his chest, looking up at the sky. The sun was coming out, breaking through thick banks of gray cloud, illuminating the sky.

The Mustang tackler rolled off. He looked at Matt queerly for a moment, and then he said, "There was an offside on that play, Harrigan. I—I almost hope it wasn't against you."

He got up and trotted away and Matt stared after him. An offside against the Beavers meant that the ball was brought back to the scrimmage line and the touchdown did not count. The guy was crazy! The Mustangs would lose the game.

McGill and several of the other Beaver players were coming up to him as he got to his feet. He took a step forward gingerly and stopped. He saw the broad grin on McGill's face. He said, "That offside—"

"Against the Mustangs," McGill chuckled. "The score counts."

He managed to get off the field under his own power. Freeman was waiting for him on the sideline as he limped toward the bench. The Beaver coach slapped his back and said, "You lucky dog. I know how much you wanted to make that score."

Matt Harrigan thought about that. Lucky! He'd gotten a break even though it had cost him a sprained ankle. He was lucky!

"Better take your shower," Freeman said. "Have Schaeffer look after that ankle."

"Okay," Matt said. He picked up his jacket and started to walk along the stands toward the dressing-room door. It was only then that he was conscious of the fact that they were cheering him in the stands. It wasn't very loud, but they were standing up and they were cheering him.

McGill waved a hand to him as he went by. The Beavers were all grinning at him as if they were a little pleased at what they'd done. It had not been much, but it was the best they had to offer.

THEY came in later when he was on the rubbing table, and Schaeffer, the club trainer, was working on his ankle. The whole squad came in and they stood around, muddy, battered, bruised, through for this sorry season.

McGill was the spokesman. McGill said, "Harrigan, we're damned sorry to see you go. There's not too much anybody can say, except that we've been proud to play alongside of you." He looked around the room, and then he went on, "If ever a football player deserved a "special day" and a lot of valuable gifts, you did, Matt. You never got it, but the boys thought it would be nice if we gave you something to remember us by."

Matt Harrigan was sitting up on the table, staring at them. He watched McGill take a little package from his football helmet, look at it for a moment, and then hand it over. McGill said, "From the boys, Matt, and always the best of luck to you."

Matt looked at the package and swal-

lowed the lump in his throat. He opened the package. It was a gold watch, not the best watch in the world, but a good watch. Inscribed on the back were the words, "To Matt Harrigan, from the Beavers."

That was the best they could do as he went out—this poor man's team. They were married men with families, like himself, and they could not dig down too deeply without feeling it, but they'd done something. They'd done more than that out on the field this afternoon. He remembered that blocking on the last play when they'd sprung him loose for the touchdown, and he felt the shame of it. He'd cursed his luck for being tied down with a club like this. He said, "Fellows, this is mighty nice. I'll never forget you. I almost wish I was starting out all over again."

"But not with the Beavers," McGill chuckled, "with the big clubs, the Bulls or the Trojans, where you belonged."

"No," Matt Harigan said softly, "it would be the Beavers. The Bulls and the Trojans only pay you in money."

He heard somebody cough in the back, and then they all came forward to shake his hand and wish him luck.

He walked out into the corridor later with McGill, after they'd dressed and he had the ankle taped. He walked slowly with a cane Schaeffer had provided for him.

They were waiting for him out there; little Matt sitting on the floor, his back against the wall; the two boys tossing a rubber ball back and forth, and Grace, very patient, smiling, looking at his ankle, concern in her eyes. They were waiting for him the way they always did at these home games. They rode downtown on the subway together.

McGill said, "Here's your gang, Matt."

There was a mist in Matt Harrigan's eyes. He said softly, "McGill, you know something?"

"What?" McGill asked him.

"I think," Matt said, "I'm the luckiest guy in this world."

And he meant it.

ANSWERS TO ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

(Questions on page 35)

1. Harold "Red" Grange, by means of the first big football tour in 1925.
2. Dickinson College (Pa.), in 1900.
3. Michigan, 1901-1905. They were tied only once in this period.
4. Howard Jones, U. S. C.—1930, 1932, 1933, 1939, 1940.
5. Eastern and Western Divisions of the National League.
6. 426 ft., 9½ inches.
7. Dodgers-Reds. Sept. 11, 1946—19 innings.
8. 13.3 seconds. Evar Swanson, playing for Columbus, made it in 1932.
9. Christy Mathewson, Giants vs. Athletics, 1905. One of Christy's many unique records.
10. Vernon Gomez—6 games.
11. Portland, Ore.—the Rosebuds, 1914.
12. True. McGill U., in Montreal, is the first team on record to play with standardized rules; but where the earlier, haphazard game originated is not known.
13. Philadelphia, 1930-1931,
14. Boston, Dec. 1940-Feb. 1941.
15. Montreal Canadiens, formed in 1909.
16. El Gato (The Cat). The game is similar to polo.
17. 550 ft., made by Jack Browne, April 28, 1945.
18. John Morissey, in 1864.
19. Bowling Green.
20. Dempsey-Firpo fight, 1923.

THE GUNLAP WAY

Then the tape was wound around his chest. . . .

By
HANK WILLARD

IT WAS like any other day in the office along about quitting time. The clerks and the stenographers were getting ready to leave and plunge into the homeward-bound traffic. Tom Rankin lingered at his desk, and a couple of brass hats came out of an inner office. One of them was Fletcher, the sales manager.

"There's one sure way to win the murder mile—start as fast as you can, pile on the pace in the middle, and when you hit that gunlap, kid—why, run like hell!"

His booming voice carried across the office. "Well, the season's started. I'll be in my accustomed seat tonight, fidgeting like an old warhorse. But it won't be too exciting. There shouldn't be much competition, particularly in the mile—"

His voice trailed off as the outer door swung shut. Tom Rankin hesitated a moment longer, then closed a desk drawer, reached for his hat and coat and started for the elevators. Fletcher and his companion were still waiting. They nodded at Tom and rode down with him in the same crowded elevator. Fletcher was still talking about the opening of the indoor track and field season. And he didn't know that the clerk who worked forty feet away from his office was entered in the mile that night, running unattached.

Tom Rankin, a few hours later, was beginning to wonder if it had been a cockeyed idea. He had run the mile in a small cow college and the competition had never amounted to very much. In the last outdoor race in his senior year he had set out to break a record. Two of his competitors were given a fifty-yard start. Four minutes and nineteen seconds later, Tom Rankin had crossed the finish line, out in front all by himself. It was a record for the cow-college track annals, but it was nothing in the big-time track world.

Two weeks later Tom had graduated. He'd got a job in New York, and he'd thought that track was behind him. He would always wish that he'd had a chance to run against the big boys, but there was nothing to do about it now.

He settled down to his desk job, a slim dark-haired young man, and no one knew about the years of training and the spikes across the cinders. He was just a clerk performing his job adequately. Then the indoor track season started, and sitting at his desk, Rankin felt the restless urge growing inside him.

The papers lamented the lack of great milers. Eagerly Tom read about the prospects, some of them college men, others out of school but running under the auspices of prominent athletic clubs. And finally he filed an entry. He represented no college, no athletic club; he was unattached, just another guy running in the mile. He spoke about it to no one at the office, he did his training before and after work.

And this was the pay-off. Rankin stood in the armory infield, flexing his leg muscles. Somewhere up there in the sea of faces was his boss, Fletcher, who did not know he was running here tonight and who probably would not even recognize him. That was just as well, Tom thought. He was probably going to be very lousy. He would probably run last and never try again. But he remembered what his cow college track coach had told him once.

"If you'd gone to a big school," Pop Duffy had said, "you might have made the grade in the big-time. Around here there's nobody who can push you."

They'd push him tonight all right, Tom told himself. He'd be eating dust all the way. The last call came and he walked slowly over toward the start of the eleven-lap track. He recognized the other milers. Three men were supposed to have a chance—Kimball from the Big Nine, Finley, ex-college star running under the Uptown Athletic Club colors, and Max Stern, local Deane University star. There were four others including Rankin.

They were lined up at the start and Tom felt his heart pound excitedly, tension tightening his arms and thighs. Then the gun went off and he was out and running, moving over to take the pole and the lead.

It was the way he had always run, going out to grab the lead. He had never been a patient runner, willing to hold back, to jockey for position. He liked to get out in front and hold the lead against his challengers, never letting a man pass him if he could help it unless it was some

fool racing himself into the ground in the early stages.

He swept around the back curve of the track and he was out there by himself, but no one paid him much attention. The fans were watching Kimball, Finley and Stern who were running together in the middle of the pack. It was early in the race; the fireworks were yet to come.

The smoky atmosphere was bothering Rankin a little. He had trained outdoors in the city parks and he was in good condition, but there was nothing like the real thing to get a man ready. He ran along steadily waiting for the challenge and at the end of three laps he was still well out in front.

He heard drumming footsteps behind him then and a figure came up alongside him. He got a flash of a white jersey and ran along evenly with it for a while, then slowed a trifle and let the man pass him. Instinct told him he was going too fast this early; he settled back into second position. A lap later the front man was obviously beginning to tire.

Tom had done six laps. He was running second and another miler was challenging him. He went by Tom and took out after the leader. Running steadily in third place, Rankin watched the duel up ahead of him. The two men were battling as though this was the final lap, and it did them both in. Rankin, without increasing his pace, began to narrow the distance.

Behind him a different sort of contest was being waged. Kimball, Finley and Stern were running bunched, watching each other. This was the first race of the year; each man figured he had two men to watch and to worry about, and they were being cautious.

Four laps to go! Tom Rankin passed the number two man, and the lead runner was staggering drunkenly ten yards ahead. Rankin swept past him on the back curve and came down the straightaway and now the crowd's excitement began to increase. Some monkey nobody'd ever heard of was out in front all by himself!

It was tough going now, Tom was thinking, but not much tougher than it had been back in college. He was out in front and he had to stay there. He could tell from the roar of the crowd that he was being pressed but he hadn't seen anyone yet.

He went around the curve and there were two laps to go. He pounded down the straightaway, not holding anything back now, not daring to turn his head but waiting to see an arm or leg flash into view. He got around the back curve and the roar of the crowd was louder. He tried to lengthen his stride.

He came around for the last big one, and he was still out in front going down the near straightaway toward the back curve, hugging the curve all the way around, moving up into the final straightaway and seeing the tape ahead of him. He fixed his eyes on it and raced straight ahead and then for the first time he saw a flash of movement on his right. But by then the tape was just ahead of him and he threw himself at it in a final lunge. And right behind him on each others' heels were Stern and Kimball and Finley, in that order.

THE TIME was announced—four minutes, twenty-one seconds. Tom Rankin, feeling a little like Cinderella, walked off the infield to the plaudits of the crowd. He dressed quickly and left the armory, wanting to be by himself, to walk around the streets and run the race over again in his mind, to pinch himself to make sure this had not been a dream.

But it was there in the paper the next morning, a picture of the finish and his name in headlines across the sports page. *Unknown Tom Rankin.* He read the paper on the bus going downtown.

The other clerks and stenographers said

good morning to him just as they always had. There was no excitement in the office. At ninety-twenty, Fletcher came in with someone else. He was talking about the race.

"This kid outfoxed them," Fletcher said. "Don't know who he is—"

Fletcher's gaze fell on Tom at his desk. He said a curt good morning and moved on; and Tom Rankin grinned a little to himself before going back to the bills of lading in front of him.

It was ten minutes later that two strangers suddenly appeared in front of his desk. One of them said to the other, "That's the guy all right. The end of the chase."

They lit cigarettes and grinned at each other. One of them said, "Why'd you run out last night? We've been hunting for you ever since. Tracked you down finally from your entry record. Where'd you go to school? I'm Harris of the *Blade*, this is Pelkey, he works for that lousy sheet, the *Sentinel.*"

As they fired questions at him, the office staff, utterly disorganized, began to stare at Tom.

Fletcher finally appeared. "What goes on?" he began and then stopped and his jaw dropped. "Rankin," he said, "you mean you're the Rankin who won the mile last night?"

Nobody got any work done in the office that morning and Fletcher took Tom out to lunch. He found out that Tom had a tiny room miles uptown.

"It's not bad," Tom said. "It's half a mile from Jackson Park. I can go over there and run when the weather's not too cold—"

"You're checking out of there today," Fletcher said. "You go up there now instead of going back to the office. Pack your stuff and report to this address. I'll be there. I'll take care of everything."

An hour later Tom went up the steps of the Half Moon Athletic Club. Fletcher was waiting there for him. He took him up the stairs to a room that had been assigned to him. He showed him all around the place, the gym with its running track, the locker rooms and swimming pool.

"It's a nice layout," Rankin said. "But on my salary—"

"You're a top athlete," Fletcher said. "Special rates."

It was very nice living at the Half Moon. He could work out there indoors and get a rubdown afterwards. There were other athletes who stayed there or who kept dropping in for a meal or a visit during an evening. And Fletcher was often there and Tom ate with him. He had a notion that Fletcher was using him a little, particularly when he brought a customer along, but Rankin could see no harm in that and it was a little flattering.

But two weeks later he was back in the armory for the second big track meet of the indoor season. He was no longer Tom Rankin, unattached; he wore the red and black colors of the Half Moon and he was one of the boys now, on a par with Max Stern and Kimball and Finley. He sat around with them in the lockers and then finally went upstairs and loosened up, watching the other events, but not really seeing them, thinking of the race to come, feeling that lump of ice in his belly. He thought of the letters and wires he had received from old friends, the wire from his college coach, Pop Duffy. He was doing the old school proud, Pop had wired him.

Finally he was over at the starting line. The gun cracked and they were off and running, and that terrible tension was gone once the action started.

He had drawn the pole and he hugged it now out in front but did not change his stride when someone passed him. It wasn't Stern or Finley or Kimball, but an unknown, and he didn't worry.

They covered three laps. He was still

running second when Lou Kimball appeared suddenly at his side. Rankin stepped up his pace and they battled it out down the straightaway and into the curve while the crowd roared. But Kimball finally managed to cut in and take the pole away from him and Tom was running third, two strides behind.

He didn't worry too much, that early in the race. He just stayed on Kimball's heels, figuring to break out and overtake him somewhere in the final two laps. That was when he figured to start his sprint—but Kimball was pouring it on.

He was no longer conscious of the roar of the crowd. He concentrated on Kimball. He cut wide and accelerated his speed but Kimball had caught his move and was in high gear himself. Tom tried to make his bid to take over on the curve but he couldn't get in front and he fell back, a stride behind. They hit the straightaway and there were drumming footsteps behind him and Finley came into view. A moment later he had dropped in behind Kimball and then it was Max Stern coming up like a runaway express.

Max pounded past Tom, running wide as they hit the curve. When they came out into the straightaway Max Stern was running first, and he had it wrapped up.

Rankin saw him break the tape. He was followed by Finley and ten yards back of him was Kimball, and Rankin straggled across in fourth place.

IT WAS pretty good time. It was four minutes and twelve seconds, and the fastest race Tom Rankin had ever been in.

Down in the locker room Kimball said, "You held on pretty good, Rankin. Of course I was running slow for a while there but when I stepped it up I thought you were going to get me."

"You were acting as a pacemaker for a while," Rankin said.

Kimball nodded. "Another lousy slow race like the last one and nobody would come out. I thought I'd heat it up a little and try to hang on for the finish. But Max was really playing it right, laying back there just where he wanted to be, and then pouring it on at the finish."

Tom Rankin knew there were things about the mile he had never learned in college. He hadn't had to learn them. But these boys could run by the clock, they could judge their time, and know just what they could do without burning themselves out.

Rankin thought about it and it took the edge off his triumph in the first mile. He'd won because he was an unknown. If he had come into town with a reputation they would never have let him get out so far in front. And now this second time they knew about him and he'd come in fourth.

It didn't make him feel like a great miler. He began wondering about his quarters down at the Half Moon. He wondered if Fletcher was beginning to think he had made a mistake. He felt self-conscious about it, and the next time Fletcher came into the club to have dinner with him, he tried to read his manner.

But Fletcher was talking about the next meet coming up. "You can't win 'em all," he said. "These are good boys. You got the jump on them but now they know you."

A guy had to be cagey in the big-time mile, Rankin figured, and he knew what he would do the next time. Max Stern he had tabbed as the best of the lot. Stern would be the guy he would have to beat.

He had it taped, he thought when he was in the armory again and waiting for the race to start. And for once he wasn't in a hurry to get out front when the gun went off. He looked for Max Stern and slipped in behind his green-jerseyed figure as they started off. Stern was running fourth and Tom stayed a stride behind him, not caring who was out in front. Tom

Rankin hung on his heels as they pounded their way around the track at a steady pace.

Some of the other men were out in front, Kimball and Finley among them, but Rankin concentrated on Stern. He was still on his heels when they came around at the end of the ninth lap and then suddenly Max Stern gave it the business.

Max was noted for his kick. He was the toughest finisher in the game; suddenly he was five strides ahead of Rankin. Tom was trying but he didn't have it. He didn't have any finish drive of his own. Max Stern went by Kimball and in the middle of the last lap he overtook Finley. He went on to win, and again Tom Rankin was fourth.

Tom showered and dressed and went back to the Half Moon. He was heading for the stairs to the second floor when he saw Fletcher. Fletcher hailed him.

"Well, you were in the money," Fletcher said. There were some strangers with him, but he didn't call Tom in to introduce him.

The next morning Tom read the papers and in one of them he was referred to as a flash in the pan who had turned in one fluke victory.

"The cheese champion," Tom Rankin muttered to himself. He read the article in the club grill while he was eating breakfast. He didn't belong here in the Half Moon, he figured, and he didn't blame the guy who had written the critical article about him. It came down to the fact that he'd gotten in here at the Half Moon on false pretenses. He was getting special rates and he didn't deserve them.

Well, it was easy enough to take care of that. He went upstairs after breakfast and packed his bags. He took a last look around at the gym, at the locker rooms, the swimming pool. Then he went down to the cashier's office and paid his final bill. He took a bus uptown and found his old room vacant. He got it back, but he couldn't even pretend it looked good to him. Just the same, it was where he belonged.

He went in to the office the next morning and Fletcher paused beside his desk. "Looked for you yesterday at the Half Moon," he said. "They told me you'd checked out."

"I'm back in my rooming house."

"Didn't like our place?" Fletcher said. He laughed shortly. "What about the Horton mile? It's three weeks away—"

"I'm not running. I've hung up my spikes."

Fletcher stared at him. "I see," he said finally.

He walked off and Rankin figured he wouldn't last long around the office. He'd made Fletcher look foolish and the boss was probably sore. Rankin thought he was doing good work, he'd put in some new ideas of his own on cost accounting, but even if he turned out to be an accounting wizard, Fletcher wasn't going to like him.

ANYWAY, he was through with track. Tom Rankin repeated that to himself when he got home that night. He said it again the next morning when he found himself wide awake at six o'clock. He was still telling himself that he was through with track when he climbed out of bed and put on sweat pants and shirt. He had a heavy parka over that and he added an overcoat and tramped outside and over to Jackson Park where he began a workout.

And at noon that day he filed his entry for the Horton Mile: Thomas Rankin, Unattached. At least this time he wouldn't be making the famous Half Moon club look like chumps. He was running on his own and nobody else would have to feel embarrassed.

He did his training outdoors, which might have been all right if the weather

hadn't taken a sharp turn for the worse. He worked out one day in the bitter cold and could hardly get out of bed the next morning.

He thought he might feel better when he got up, and he tried to go to work. But when he boarded the bus at the corner he knew it was a mistake. He got off halfway downtown to take a bus back home but there was none in sight and he was afraid he might pass out.

The Half Moon club was a block away. He got up the steps and sagged into the arms of the doorman.

An hour later, stretched out in bed in his old room, he looked up to see Fletcher staring at him. A doctor stood beside Fletcher.

"He'll be all right," the doctor said. "Lots of rest, a bland diet today—"

"Listen," said Fletcher. "He's got to run in the Horton Mile a week from Saturday."

The doctor said, "A Half Moon athletic star, is he? I didn't know—"

"He doesn't run under the Half Moon colors," Fletcher said. "I guess he doesn't like us. Maybe he has another club in mind. He's running unattached. Get him ready for that race. Rankin, you can consider this your vacation. Don't show up at the office. Besides, I want to try out that new system of yours in accounting. I'd rather try it out while you're not there."

Rankin had been too tired to say anything. But twenty-four hours and close attention made a difference. Two days later he was working out again. He didn't see Fletcher at all, but on the day of the race the trainer came to him.

"Are you wearing the Half Moon colors?" the trainer said. "You don't have to, you know."

Rankin hesitated. "I'd be proud to wear them," he said.

He carried them in his bag to the armory and put them on downstairs. Once more he wore the pants and jersey of a big athletic club, but he knew the uniform didn't mean anything. He was not a big-timer who knew the ropes, he was not a wise apple when it came to track. He was a hick with straw in his hair, and tonight he wasn't going to try to outsmart anybody.

They were finally ready upstairs and Tom Rankin peeled off his sweatshirt and went over and joined the other men at the line.

The starter lined them up. Tom bent forward and was running with the crack of the gun, moving over and taking the pole and giving it the old cow college try.

He was all alone that first lap and then he was pressed. A jersey flashed into view and for a moment Tom debated the issue. But he was running hard and he couldn't go all out now. He didn't challenge as the runner swept past him. It was not one of the big men.

Rankin went around the curve and took a quick backward look at Kimball, Finley and Max Stern running in a bunch. He didn't slow his own pace. Two laps later he put his speed up a notch. If he were going to have a chance tonight he had to get enough of a jump to overcome Max Stern's final two-lap kick.

On the seventh lap he caught the front runner and took the lead again. Max Stern was not far behind now and he accelerated again with three and a half laps to go. Kimball and Finley were challenging Max Stern now behind him, overtaking Stern and running second and third.

Rankin came into the ninth lap, and turned on all he had left. Kimball and Finley were afraid to let him get any further ahead. He could hear them running one-two just behind him all around the back turn and down the straightaway. He rounded the curve again and he knew he had beaten them both off.

But it wasn't over; he heard the roar

of the crowd and he knew what it meant. Cagey and cold as ice, Max Stern had saved himself for that famous kick.

TOM pounded down the tenth straightaway, hit the curve and was in the final lap, rounding the bend and running down the near side.

He couldn't hear Max's pounding feet. The noise of the crowd drowned all other sound; but instinct told him Max was right behind him. He took the final curve hugging the pole and the track straightened out and led down to the tape. He fixed his eyes on it, waiting to see Max lunge past him . . . and then the tape was wound around his chest.

The time, the man said, was four-twelve, and the crowd seemed happy. Tom was starting for the lockers when Fletcher joined him.

"Nice of you to wear our colors tonight," Fletcher said, but he sounded a little grim. "Why didn't you like the Half Moon? At first when you told me you weren't running I thought you were a quitter, you didn't have the guts to take a beating. Then when you did enter, the boys down at the Half Moon got the idea you were snooting us, you preferred one of the other clubs. Maybe you were doing us a favor tonight wearing our uniform—"

Rankin had been listening to him in amazement. "You got it wrong," he said. "I love the place. I didn't think I was good enough. I wasn't winning, I—"

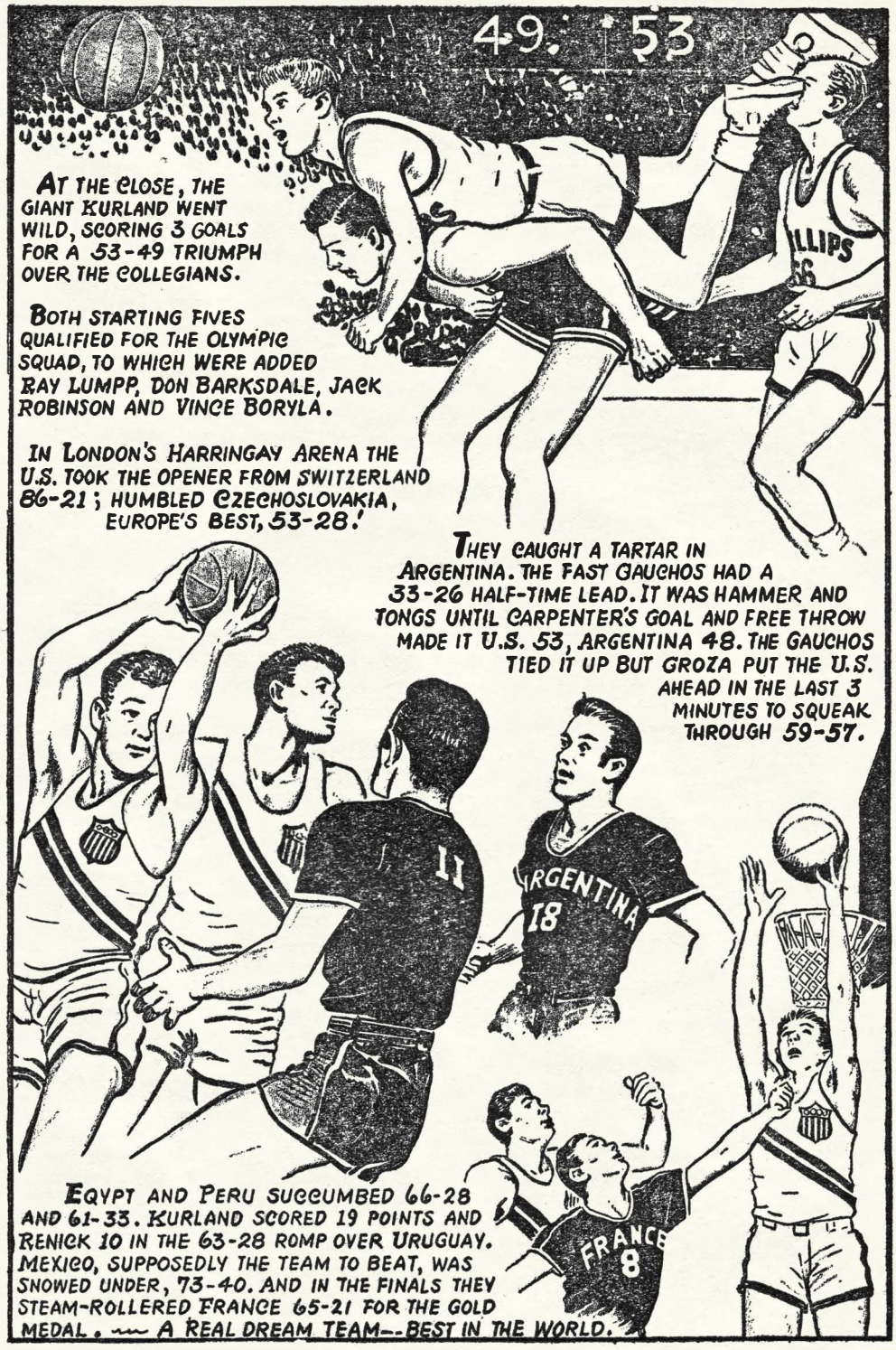
"Everybody can't win," Fletcher said. "I'm treasurer of the Half Moon. I was a half miler in college. I got my letter but I never won a race in four years. You chump! You're staying at the Half Moon from now on then, I take it."

Tom Rankin shook his head. "No," he said, shaking his head, "I'd like to but you gave me a special deal on rates. I don't like that kind of deal, and I can't afford the regular rates."

Fletcher grinned at him and shook his head in mock disgust. "So you put me in a vise," he said. "Well, it's a good thing that accounting system of yours worked out. I guess it entitles you to a raise. Now what do you think?"

Tom Rankin, at home finally in the big town, grinned at him. "Come on back to the club," he said. "The drinks are on me and we'll talk track all night."


MIGHTY MEN of SPORT
KURLAND
CARPENTER
PITTS
RENICK
COACH BROWNING
MASTERS of THE COURT
THE PHILLIPS 66 OILERS, PROBABLY THE GREATEST AMATEUR BASKETBALL TEAM EVER ASSEMBLED, CAME INTO MADISON SQUARE GARDEN FOR THE 1948 OLYMPIC TRYOUTS WITH A SEASON'S RECORD OF 61 WINS IN 65 GAMES.
ORGANIZED IN 1921 AT BARTLESVILLE, OKLA., THE OILERS, MADE UP OF FORMER COLLEGE STARS, HAD WON 7 NATIONAL TITLES--THE LAST 6 IN A ROW— AND WITH THE UNIVERSALS WON THE 1936 OLYMPICS. NOW THEY WERE OUT FOR ANOTHER WORLD CROWN.
47
45
Bob Kurland
BUILT AROUND 7-FOOT BOB KURLAND, ALL-AMERICAN CENTER, WITH CAPT. CARPENTER AND R.C. PITTS GUARDS, LEW BECK AND JESSE RENICK FORWARDS, THE OILERS BREEZED INTO THE FINALS WITH THE U. OF KENTUCKY WILDCATS WITH THE FAMOUS RALPH BEARD, ALEX GROZA, WAH WAH JONES, CLIFF BARKER AND KEN ROLLINS.
THAT MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED THE GREATEST BASKETBALL GAME OF ALL TIME!
AFTER 12 MINUTES KENTUCKY LED 20-13. THE OILERS SURGED BACK WITH 13 STRAIGHT POINTS. THEY CAGED 11 MORE TO THE WILDCATS' 1, THEN, SPARKED BY BEARD, KENTUCKY WHIPPED AHEAD 47-45.
BEARD


49
53
AT THE CLOSE, THE GIANT KURLAND WENT WILD, SCORING 3 GOALS FOR A 53-49 TRIUMPH OVER THE COLLEGIANS.
BOTH STARTING FIVES QUALIFIED FOR THE OLYMPIC SQUAD, TO WHICH WERE ADDED RAY LUMPP, DON BARKSDALE, JACK ROBINSON AND VINCE BORYLA.
IN LONDON'S HARRINGAY ARENA THE U.S. TOOK THE OPENER FROM SWITZERLAND 86-21; HUMBLED CZECHOSLOVAKIA, EUROPE'S BEST, 53-28!
THEY CAUGHT A TARTAR IN ARGENTINA. THE FAST GAUCHOS HAD A 33-26 HALF-TIME LEAD. IT WAS HAMMER AND TONGS UNTIL CARPENTER'S GOAL AND FREE THROW MADE IT U.S. 53, ARGENTINA 48. THE GAUCHOS TIED IT UP BUT GROZA PUT THE U.S. AHEAD IN THE LAST 3 MINUTES TO SQUEAK THROUGH 59-57.
ILLIPS
56
11
RGENTINA
18
FRANCE
8
EGYPT AND PERU SUCCUMBED 66-28 AND 61-33. KURLAND SCORED 19 POINTS AND RENICK 10 IN THE 63-28 ROMP OVER URUGUAY. MEXICO, SUPPOSEDLY THE TEAM TO BEAT, WAS SNOWED UNDER, 73-40. AND IN THE FINALS THEY STEAM-ROLLERED FRANCE 65-21 FOR THE GOLD MEDAL. — A REAL DREAM TEAM--BEST IN THE WORLD.

Who was the second-string back who was pulverizing the unbeatable Wolves? Nobody knew . . . but one thing was sure: in that last-down battle between the scrub and the champs, history was being made—and eleven T-and-T tyrants were being driven off the field forever!

He straight-armed Pelkey, and it jarred him. . . .

• LAST YARD GUY •

HARLEY KING was always one for having a raft of backs around and we didn't notice this kid much at first. He weighed about one-seventy and he wasn't particularly rugged-looking and although he seemed pretty fast, everyone knew he wouldn't last long.

His name on the roster was George Smith and when we did speak to him we called him "Smitty" and that seemed all right. He never said much, anyway, not then, not even later. He was a medium-blond fellow, not as young as some of the other rookies, not old, either. Harley King spent some time with him and then shipped him to the Behemoth

By WILLIAM R. COX

farm. Then the season started and Smitty wasn't even a memory.

That was the season the Behemoths were fighting to get out of the red and the only way we could do it was to win often and finally beat the Wolves. Pat Monteel coached and partly owned the Wolves and Harley King would rather beat Monteel than eat. Harley was a great guy and we were all for him, besides which we wanted to stay in business.

We wanted to continue to play football, that is. There is a lot of talk about us play-for-pay boys and a lot of sneering about the pro way of playing, but football is a strange game. I've been in it twelve years as prep, college and pro quarterback of the Behemoths and I've got a nice hardware store back home and a wife and two kids and I don't have to play football. I could quit tomorrow. But I stick. I'll stick until my legs go. And not for the dough, either. The money is nice and I get plenty, but to take those bumps every Sunday is another thing. No, I stick because I want to play football.

The real pros, the ones that last, are that way.

Don't let anyone tell you different.

Harley King is the same way. He'd be a success in any business. He's a real personality guy and besides that he's smart and honest and capable. He was a great player in his day. He's a great coach.

Pat Monteel was never much as a player but he coached at Harmouth and Midwest, powerhouse colleges, and went to the Wolves with a big rep, getting a hunk of stock and huge salary to boot, and he made the Wolves the scourge of the league, all right. He brought Pelkey from Midwest and Pelkey reminds you of Nagurski playing fullback. He bought Simon and Ragland and Carey and a dozen other backs and he inherited that indestructible line, Saratov, Pitzig, Lansing, Garrity — those fellows. Nobody liked Pat Monteel, but he was successful.

We did all right. We beat about everybody we needed to beat. We slammed through a good season. I had eight good offensive backs and Harley used his defensive material smartly and we got along. It's like running a big business organization nowadays, with this unlimited substitution rule—everyone is a cog and has his place and if you can find a bit of spark at the right moment you get places.

Mostly we got our scoring sparks from Ed Folley, the old war-horse who could run and fake and kick and pass and carry the water bucket for a few plays when he was needed. Ed was a smoothie, a sharpshooter and a nice guy, only he liked to go out and see the spots. Toward the end of the season he was seeing spots all right, before his eyes. That was one bad break.

Then his sub, Potsy Fein, sprained an ankle and a third man, I forgot his last name, his first was Aces, he fell in the showerbath and broke his elbow. So we had me at quarterback, Wally Craig to block, Joe Ransom at full and two or three clunks to take Ed's place, none of whom were better than ordinary. And we had the game with the Wolves coming up.

Harley King said to me, "Harry, it couldn't happen. But it did. It's uncanny."

I said, "Uncanny? Are you trying to stay sane with understatement, Harley? Uncanny? It's impossible! It's murder!"

Harley didn't seem to be listening to me. He said, "Smitty told me. The day he left he came in and told me."

"Smitty? Who in the hell is Smitty?"

Harley said, "George Smith. He'll be in tonight. Work him into Ed's spot. I think Ed may be able to play—he's been sober for a week. But he'll need relief. Smitty will be it."

I said, "Now wait, Harley. Have you gone nuts? Smitty—I remember him.

Just a light, fast guy. We've got two men better than Smitty."

Harley King said, "Not against the Wolves, we haven't."

There was something about the way he said it. I know Harley better than anyone and I know when to shut up and listen to him. He sat back in his office chair and looked at me and said, "Harry, football is what you and I know it is. With us right now it is business. But it is also a game and a game in which a certain spirit inside certain men in certain moments makes the difference between winning and losing. It is a game where you want to win every time out. Baseball teams never win every game. Basketball teams get beaten, even the best. The players take their defeats philosophically and go on. Football players sometimes cry, no?"

I was startled. After the Wolves nosed us out last year I had seen three of our guys with tears in their eyes but I didn't think Harley had noticed.

He went on, "I don't like Pat Monteel. I don't like his methods, his personality —nor some things in his past. I'm bringing in Smitty and you're going to use him."

I said, "I don't get it, but we'll do it."

"That's the nice thing about you, Harry," he grinned. "You go along with a guy."

SMITTY reported. I had clippings of his record with the farm team and he had been a fair running back, just fair. Nothing in his performance had been spectacular. He passed a little, kicked pretty good, ran for a good average. He came to my apartment and Mary fed him and he was mannerly and quiet and I liked him. I gave him the works all week, everything we had.

The boys eyed him askance, but they were all good workers. Ed Folley was pallid and contrite and obviously out of condition and Ed worried more than anyone else about this mediocre newcomer stepping into his shoes.

But Ed went along, too, warning him about the Wolves and their cute little fists and Pelkey the Man-eater, the roughest man in pro ball, the New Nagurski. Smitty nodded and thanked Ed and kept on learning. By Sunday he was fitting into the key offensive spot about as well as any minor leaguer could be expected to fit.

The sun was bright enough but the sky was November that Sunday at Behemoth Field. There was breeze enough to starch the pennants around the rim of the grandstand and there were enough people to make the cash registers swell a little. If we beat the Wolves and held top ranking we could last another year on the strength of it. The opposition couldn't show a record like ours.

The Wolves were in much the same spot. Monteel was confident, especially when he learned about a new guy named Smith who was taking Ed Folley's place. He smirked and mugged around, a big, hard-faced man with unpleasant pale eyes. He intimated that Harley King, his old friend, was a bit out of date perhaps in his methods and referred to our line as somewhat moth-eaten.

Harley read us all this after we had warmed up and retired for our last-minute confabulation. Smitty was sitting alongside me on a bench in the corner of the locker room. He was as calm and cool as any of us. Harley read from the papers in a low voice, without hamming it up. Then he looked at Smitty.

Harley said, "They've got more strength on paper. They're supposed to be two touchdowns better than us. I don't believe it. I don't believe a character like Monteel can build a team to beat you fellows—when the chips are down!"

Smitty got up with the rest of us. We went out there with our blood tingling

because Harley was with us and Harley believed in us and didn't try to kid us but just said what he thought. We knew we could trust Harley. I guess nobody even thought about a kid named Smith being in the backfield on offense, part-time. Everyone was thinking of his own job that day.

Chief among the jobs each man took to himself was that of taking care of Pelkey. Not crippling him—that's not good business in the pros. Pelkey was box-office. We needed Pelkey for color. He was a giant and a horse and maybe part alligator, and he stayed on the field sixty minutes if Monteel allowed it, and people paid to see Pelkey. And we had to take care of him.

We had big, strong guys up there on the line, Dreyfuss and Morgan and Healy and Cannon and Graybar and Levison and more behind them too, and we had ends like McGonigle the pass-snatcher and Levison the faker and we had our own Joe Ransom, a hell of a fullback. But we did not have a Pelkey. We thought a lot about Pelkey.

Graybar was our captain. He went out and won the toss from them and came back grim but happy. He said Pelkey and Monteel were laughing on the sideline and all the Wolves were rimmed up and cocky. He said they were calling at him and Monteel was making wisecracks.

That was the way Monteel played it. Every angle—trying to steam you up if you had rabbit ears, trying to override you if you lacked confidence. It was a hippodrome to him, win any way you can, rock 'em, sock 'em, make 'em eat it. Pelkey was his boy.

Pelkey was All America at Midwest. He had Nat Horbalt for quarterback and blocker and nothing stopped him. They said he was a little slow in starting and had a bad habit or two which tipped his direction but Horbalt and Monteel drilled it out of him. Horbalt was a whale of a player—he got killed in the war.

I was thinking about this Horbalt when we went onto the field, remembering about Grange and how Britton had been such a help for the Great Red until Grange found himself. And Big Jim, on the line, who later became a wrestler and he died too. . . . And I was thinking about Eckersall and Heston and those other midwesterns even before Nagurski's time, and Oliphant who came out of Purdue, and I was thinking this damned Pelkey was one of them. There was a tradition in football stemming from these names and this damned Pelkey was its inheritor and he wasn't a nice guy and I hated it.

We were receiving and Smitty was deep on the goal line and I was shorter and Craig and Ransom were back even with Smitty. Saratov kicked off for them and it was over Smitty's head, a good one, and I got ready for taking over on the twenty. But something made me keep watching Smitty.

He ran back. He grabbed the ball. I was numb for a minute, because he could cost us the game pulling a skull like that. Then I knew I had to do something, so I fired a block onto Peterson who was down awful fast for them. A great end, Peterson.

I heard Craig yell and then I hit someone else of theirs and got to my feet and there was Smitty, going past me with the ball, up to our fifteen and I could breathe again. Dreyfuss and Morgan led in and took out a couple of Wolves and Smitty snaked past the twenty, just running along, but covering ground. He got past a back and Pelkey came over like a runaway train and hurled his bulk at Smitty.

I thought that was the end of Harley's strange sub. Pelkey hit him, he couldn't miss there at the sideline. They went rolling out of bounds to the Wolves

bench. I ran over and they were right at Monteel's feet. Pelkey got up first. Then the kid got up.

Monteel was staring at him. Smitty stared back at Monteel. Pelkey said something I didn't hear. Smitty said, "How are things, Chump?"

Pelkey drew back his fist but Monteel grabbed him.

Then I knew that there was something fishy about the whole thing. It had smelled funny before but now it was for sure. Smitty knew Pelkey and Monteel, and they knew him. Monteel looked sort of sick, then defiant, then angry. Pelkey glared like a wild man and Monteel put in a sub for him.

Smitty came back on the field and he didn't even seem shaken by the awful crush Pelkey had put on him. The ball was on the thirty-yard line and I wheeled them into the T formation and chucked a dinky over the line to McGonigle and old Glue-fingers held onto it. A Wolves end cut back to nail him. Someone blotted out the end and McGonigle went to midfield. It was Smitty who had thrown the block on the end. . . .

PELKEY came back on the field to back the line. I called the 66 play and handed-off to Smitty. I followed the play with Craig blocking. Smitty cut over between guard and tackle, moving in that smooth but ordinary sort of way he had. Pelkey dove.

The kid's arm shot out. This was the first time I had ever seen his stiff. In practice we never use it, of course, for fear of hurting our own guys. Now Smitty slammed it in there. I never saw anyone jar that Pelkey with a straight-arm before.

Smitty wheeled a little, but not away from Pelkey. He went *into* him, that arm out like a ramrod. He rode right over Pelkey for five yards before Carey got him.

So we had a first down to spare. We were well in there and I tried two passes. Pelkey busted up both of them.

I was reaching away out, but the thing was set up by the weirdness of it all and I gave it to Smitty on the reverse. He timed it perfectly, took it, spun and followed Craig and the pulled-out guard. He ran low, picking up steam as he went. He broke through the hole and again he reversed. Pelkey came up and took a cut at him.

Pelkey missed him by a foot. Smitty was ready for Carey. He gave old Carey the same straight-arm treatment he had accorded Pelkey. By that time we had blocking down there. Smitty got with it and rambled.

Smitty scored on the Wolves. I converted, like always.

We went off the field and the defensive gang came on. Pelkey was storming at Monteel on the sideline. Monteel waved his arms. Simon, Ragland and some other cuties came on for the Wolves.

Harley King said to Smitty, "You were right, huh?"

Nobody but me and Smitty could hear Harley, he spoke so low.

Smitty said, "I just want a crack at him." The kid's face was tight now, his eyes sunken. Hitting Pelkey is no fun, not for the toughest of us. The kid had to feel it, he had to be shaken. There was a little bruise on his jaw, I could see now. But his eyes burned and his face was set in a hard mask.

Harley said, "You'll get your cracks. I hope you can take what he hands back."

"It doesn't matter about that," said Smitty.

"Monteel knows you now," said Harley. "Watch yourself."

"That's all right," said Smitty. He wasn't paying any attention to Harley now, he was watching the field.

The Wolves were terrific on offense. Our one score wouldn't mean anything.

You had to be ready to take it from them and then go back and smack them again, and the one who smacked oftenest came out on top.

They scored, Pelkey diving over. Then they took Pelkey out. That was strange, because he usually played the entire first half on both offense and defense. But Monteel called him off and he seemed willing enough to go.

We went back on, Smitty and Folley and Ransom and me and the ends and a guard. We couldn't stop their kick-off this time because it skidded past the goal line and went out. We lined up on the twenty and I gave it to Ransom and he smashed for five.

He couldn't go on the next play despite a terrific block Smitty threw on their end. I thought of quick-kicking, but there was Smitty and that strange feeling and I felt nobody expected me to kick. I gave it to Smitty.

Our line seemed to rise up like a wave. They cut down Wolves and splashed all over them. Smitty picked up a first down on the thirty-five.

Ransom got two. I heaved a little one to McGonigle for six. Then I guess everyone in the park knew it was Smitty. The dumbest thing in the world was to give it to him. I knew better than to hesitate, though. I called him on the 66.

He didn't start any faster than other backs. He just came on in good timing, took the ball, reversed and shoved into the hole. The boys opened it and he went into it. They were playing over their heads, right from the start, our linemen. He got through and then he was murder.

He fought, clawed and struggled to their thirty-yard line. He got some blocking, sure, but mostly he fought good men, the Wolves, knocking them about. And Monteel sent Pelkey back into the game.

We had a little play, one that started like a pass, then when the blocking formed, sent the ball carrier off tackle. It was a quickie from the single wing and it seemed good for this spot. I wanted to get men between Smitty and Pelkey. I took the center snap and faked the forward.

Smitty came edging around and I handed off to him. I cut off the lunging guard and went on down. Pelkey was heaving the blockers aside. He got one hand on Smitty. He let the stiff arm slide off his helmet. He dragged Smitty down and a couple went on top and I threw myself in there fast. I saw Pelkey slug at the kid's ribs, and I got hold of his arm and jammed my elbow into his throat. He snarled like a wild animal. Smitty rolled over and got up, but he was staggering. He just looked at Pelkey and said, "Sure. That's your way. That's you all over, Chump."

Then he laughed. His guts must have been aching like a sore tooth but he laughed.

And the referee penalized us for me piling on!

The team gathered in the huddle and Graybar called a time out. They were a big bunch of louts with dirty faces but that day they were sore at Monteel and the Wolves and they had that little spark they'd got from seeing Smitty go after Pelkey. They growled and grumbled. We went back and lined up and I faked the pass to McGonigle again and slid a shovel over to Smitty.

There were four of our linemen with him at the beginning. The Wolves were strong and smart and went under them, knocking them about, but Smitty went flitting past them. He was fast, like I said, and today he was faster than ever. He just plain ran away from the Wolves and scored another touchdown. I converted.

Sitting on the bench, watching the Wolves tear and rip at our defense men,

watching Pelkey give a real demonstration of how to jam a football down the field, it didn't seem possible that Smitty could have done it. An unknown with no record to brag of, he had scored twice on the almighty Wolves. We had given him pretty good support, sure, but not all that good. This boy was hotter than a two-dollar pistol and the funny part was that Harley King had known it, Harley had called him back and put him in for just this game. It was uncanny.

THE WOLVES had a little trouble with our guys and it took them a long time to score. The quarter ended, we changed goals and midway in the second period we were back in the game, Smitty and the rest of us. I kept dinking little passes to keep them loose, and McGonigle kept snagging them, tumbling, leaping, but always getting them. Then I would simply pick a spot and send Smitty with the mail and the boys up ahead ripped at the Wolves and we went down the field.

We had it on their five. I sent Ransom at them and they got very high and stopped him for no gain. I tried it myself and got smeared the same way. I had nothing left to do but fake the pass to McGonigle. I did that.

Then I gave it to Smitty. I swear the whole Wolves line was ready and waiting. It was murder.

The kid went into it. Pelkey was on the goal line. Smitty blasted through, but he had lost his momentum when he got to Pelkey. Graybar missed his block. Pelkey got his clean shot at a sitting duck.

The crash could be heard in the next county. The half ended on the play and Pelkey was snorting and laughing in that ugly way of his when I got over there. Smitty hadn't scored this time. He was stretched out cold and I think Pelkey would have kicked him as he lay there if we hadn't been around to stop him. I never saw such hatred on a man's face.

We carried him off. We put him on a stretcher and the doctor walked alongside and took over when we got him to the dressing room. Nobody said much between halves, not Harley, not any of us.

We went out and left Smitty. Ed Folley went in there when we got the ball and did all right. I kept punting. We almost held them to a tie. They kept sending in new linemen with ready fists and we took an awful lacing. Finally, in the middle of the fourth quarter Pelkey bucked it over and they led us 21-14 and there went the old ball game.

We lined up to receive and the guts were gone. We were just in there to go through the motions and play for a tie game. I felt it, we all felt it. Our early lift was gone, and the Wolves knew it and Pelkey was rubbing it in with raucous gibes.

Then someone ran on the field and I saw Graybar spin and stare and I didn't have to look. I knew it was Smitty.

The strangest part of the whole thing was that he didn't limp, stagger or look hurt. He looked fine and rested, that was all. His eyes were clear, because I looked. He just said, "Let me have it, Harry. Gimme the damn ball."

The kick came down. I took it behind the goal and ran out. I saw Smitty tincanning along and when we had the Wolves drawn one step over I lateraled to him.

There were six Wolves around and about and in one second there were six tremendous blocks thrown. Then Smitty was going along in that steady way of his. This time I kept with him, watching. I saw Pelkey coming over in time. I took off with all I had and nailed him dead center. He almost got by me, at that, only I hooked his knee. He cursed and tried to kick me and I served him a bunch of fives where the referee couldn't

see and left him there. That was the only real good deed I performed that day, but it let Smitty loose.

And when he was loose that day, Smitty rambled. He went straight past two Wolves, switched his pace, picked up interference from McGonigle and Levison and the three of them sped across the goal line standing up. I converted.

So we had a tie game. I hated to leave the field. I saw Harley King waving. I blinked. Harley was motioning for me to stay in. He was sending Ed Folley on for Craig and Buck Sommer for Ransom. That was all.

Ed could defend passes like a dreamboat. Buck was big and strong and game. That left Smitty and me. We kicked over the goal.

I went back to safety, pondering. Smitty was on the wing. Simon, cool and calm, was sending Pelkey to get back the score and go ahead. Pelkey rammed his head through the line.

Smitty was up there. Our guys held Pelkey for a moment and that gave Smitty time to slide under Pelkey and trip him. The Wolves made a yard on the play.

Simon opened up with a pass. He kept it away from Folley and Peterson grabbed it off his fingertips for a first down.

Simon used Pelkey again, to the right, and Pelkey made five. Then Simon threw another pass. Ed Folley got to it all right and almost grabbed it. But it rolled off his fingertips and I had to make a flying stab to bring down Peterson on our forty.

They came down to our ten that way. Then Pelkey, with a first down and goal to go, rolled up his sleeves and made his grandstand play. He took the ball and plunged.

He was going into the middle but Smitty came all the way from the wing and when Pelkey broke through Smitty was there. Smitty seemed to explode when he hit Pelkey. The Wolves fullback came down all sprawled out. Smitty was moving back, watching him with a set, eager expression. Pelkey went back. Simon called him again, off the other tackle, away from Smitty.

Smitty was there. He drifted over like a ghost, but he was no wraith when he hit Pelkey. Some of our guys were in it too, but it was Smitty who put the pin in it. You could hear Pelkey squish all over the field.

Smitty was crouched a little, watching his man. Pelkey got up and walked in a little circle. There was blood on his lips. His eyes were glazed. Simon spoke sharply to him. Pelkey mumbled something and one of his teeth popped out onto the grass.

SIMON quickly called a signal. He tried that pass again and it came deep down the middle, the smart way and into my hands. It was no place to grab a pass but time was running out. I took it away from Peterson with some little effort and ran five yards to our six.

We lined up and Ransom came back in and took a slam at them. The clock was showing little space for the Wolves. They tried to steal the ball. Pelkey, looking strange with that hole in his mouth where the tooth had been knocked out, was hysterical. Ransom took it again and Pelkey almost wrestled the ball away and got a penalty and that moved us out.

Then, because that was the way it had to be, I gave it to Smitty, right down the middle, on a play which was to allow the clock to run, with fourth down coming up when I would have to kick and give them a chance once more. I took it from center and slammed it into Smitty and stood up and watched him go.

Pelkey was there. I swear Pelkey could have had him. Smitty weaseled through, but Pelkey was right in line. The space of time when Pelkey could have had him was short, but it was there.

I saw Pelkey flinch.

It doesn't seem possible, not Pelkey, not that part horse, part alligator man. But he did. he ratted on the tackle and when he did Smitty swerved close and stabbed that straight-arm at him and Pelkey went over backwards and believe it or not he spluttered as he fell and a lot of blood and another tooth came out of his big. fat mouth.

And Smitty ran all the whole damn way and scored another touchdown on the Wolves and that is in the book. You can find it and read it for yourself. That's what Smitty did that day against the Wolves when we beat them by two touchdowns and won the championship and lost Monteel his job for being whacked by the underdogs.

Pelkey was trying to get off the field after the gun. I was sticking close by and so were Graybar and Ed Folley and a couple of other big ones from our side. Smitty caught him at the sideline and Monteel was there, too. Smitty said, "Well, Chump, that about shows you up. You'll never be so tough again."

Pelkey didn't even answer. It was amazing the way he took it, head down, dragging himself off the field, feeling his mouth with his hand, spitting blood.

Monteel said, "I'm protesting this game. Your name ain't Smith—"

Smitty said in his quiet voice, "I'd like to hit you, Monteel, but you're too old and too yellow. If anyone hit you, you would holler cop on them. You're a heel and Pelkey's a yellow jerk. Football is no game for a toad like you, Monteel, you should be in the rackets."

And Monteel took it!

We went back and celebrated a little, but we all felt sort of queer. Finally Harley came in and Smitty was dressed by then and Harley put his arm around him and said, "Fellows, this is Pooley Horbalt. He had a brother. His brother played for Midwest. Monteel was the coach there and Pelkey was the big gun. Horbalt did a lot for Pelkey.

"Then, senior year, Horbalt got hurt and didn't play and Pelkey and Monteel saw that he lost his scholarship and that Pelkey got the job Horbalt was using to pay his way through school and take care of his kid brother. Then Horbalt went into the war and Pelkey did too, and Monteel, and not to go into all that, Horbalt saved Pelkey and Monteel one time when they would surely have been killed. Horbalt was killed."

Graybar said heavily, "So that's why Smitty had Pelkey's number."

"Smitty had his number," said Harley. "Smitty knew him, knew a few things about him we didn't ever learn. How he tips his direction—it's just a flick of the eye and you have to watch him and know him but Smitty proved he could do it. And that underneath he's yellow. He's tough and strong but he has got a little geezer in him. Smitty took an awful beating out there but when he didn't let Pelkey see he was hurt there was nothing to it. Smitty warned me of all this—but how he knew we'd need him I can't explain. Because you did say we'd need you, Smitty . . . Pooley."

He grinned a little sadly. "I don't know how I could manage to run for those touchdowns, either. I can't explain it. . . . I just wished it into happening, maybe. I'll never be that good on a field again, coach, I warn you."

He never was, either.

He married a little gal over in Jersey and they got him coaching the farm team at more dough than he'd make playing the kind of halfback he ordinarily played.

Pelkey? He never was any good after that. He's out of the league, so is Monteel.

I know it doesn't make sense, but it fits into the traditions of Heston and Eckersall and Grange and Oliphant a whole lot better than Pelkey and Monteel fitted!

EIGHT-SECOND CHAMP

By WILSON ADAMS

He'd flattened many a better man—but he won his greatest match—flat on his back!

"PHILADELPHIA Jack" O'Brien was one of the few gentlemen of the ring in his day. O'Brien abhorred caps and turtle-neck sweaters. He dressed like a fashion plate, and associated with bluebloods.

Jack was one of the smartest and most scientific of boxers. He was no great shakes, as a hitter, but didn't need to be because he could outsmart almost anybody. So when O'Brien was matched with Stanley Ketchell for a ten-round bout at the Pioneer Club in New York, everyone in town thought he would win.

Ketchell, "the Michigan Assassin," was a deadly hitter with either hand. He had whipped many star middleweights in the West, and roared into New York with a brilliant reputation. He could knock out anyone he could hit. That was admitted, but to flatten an enemy you have to hit him. O'Brien said, without the least modesty, that there wasn't anybody in the world who could do that to him.

A Western millionaire, who thought Stanley the most sensational fighter of all time, offered to bet $2,500 even money that his favorite would kayo the Philadelphia boxing master. Jack took that bet. No man could put him away in ten rounds. He would have gambled his life on that.

The Assassin was fast with both hands and feet. He punched out of a confusing shift, and had found no one who could absorb his thundering blows. But he found a ghost in the ring of the Pioneer Club that night, an elusive phantom he could not touch.

O'Brien seemed to float away from blows, to dodge them, or get inside them, or block them with arms or elbows. His fast, perfectly timed jabs kept raving, slugging Ketchel off balance. Round after round he won as he pleased, rocking and jolting, if not hurting the furious youngster from Michigan.

When the tenth round started, there was no question as to who had won, barring an unexpected knockout. Not a single canto was credited to the knockout star, and the millionaire who had bet on Stanley sat glum and unhappy by the ringside.

That round went as the others had—Ketchell rushing, throwing punches; O'Brien evading them and countering. Then, with only eight seconds left of a completely one-sided fight, Stanley threw a mad and hopeless right. It landed on the button, and the shocked O'Brien went down, his head under the ropes, eyes closed, completely unconscious.

The millionaire, who had bet on a knockout, leaped to his feet, yelling ecstatically. He had won! That's what he thought. But the bell ending the fight sounded just as the referee counted "eight."

There were bitter and endless arguments. O'Brien had won every second of that fight but the last eight. There was also no doubt that, had the fight lasted another three seconds, Jack would have been counted out. It didn't—and the man from the West paid $2,500 to the Philadelphian, who had won in spite of the fact that he finished flat on his back, knocked colder than a mackerel!

I thought, *He's going too fast. . . .*

By

RAY P. SHOTWELL

THERE'S still a few maverick promoters around the country; the Association hasn't got everything sewed up. A fact I was thankful for, this summer. I'd had words with the Association, the words having to do with appearance money, and they'd had the last word, as usual.

Maybe I was born too soon. Maybe I'm a hold-over from a forgotten age when a man had to earn his way. But that "appearance money" angle was too much for my stomach. Just the big names got it,

The lead-footed kid rode the bucket of the mighty, wheeling an outlaw iron . . . where each eternity-crowding instant meant crashing oblivion—smashing a record—or blasting a champion's thunder!

OUTLAW WHEELS

and the last three races I'd seen 'em in, none of the names finished better than sixth. Why should they? They got paid, either way, and some horrible things can happen on the dirt.

So, at the end of the previous season I'd raised my loud and obnoxious voice in no uncertain terms, to coin a phrase, and the Association had answered politely, and I'd raised my voice again, and they'd been less polite, and I'd raised my voice again, and . . .

I wasn't running the Association tracks, this year. I was going to travel the outlaw dirt. I told Rex about it, in February, and tried to make it sound good.

Rex colored and smiled kind of weak, and didn't look at me. "I—can't afford to jump the Association, Barney. I'm thinking of the big one, this year, the brickyard."

From Horner's Grove, Iowa, I'd taken him, with alfalfa in his ears. From the county fair bullrings, I'd taken him, to the big one. But he couldn't afford to stick with me this year. He was wearing the Association "2" this season, and thinking of the "1".

I thought of a lot of things to say, but what I said was, "It would have to be your decision, Rex."

Well, I still had Hank. I told Hank about it, and he said, "I'm thirty-eight, Barney. A hard track I can handle, and a *first rate* grit oval. But not the outlaw dirt, Barney. My wrists are as old as I am."

That left me without a driver. It left me with the best mech in the business, Spec Allen, and not a wheeler for either of the D.O.'s.

Spec's got four years of M.I.T. behind him and I never could figure him traveling the circuit with us. He must have had some offers, a boy with his savvy.

Skinny kid, he is, and horn-rimmed glasses thick as the bottom of a beer bottle, quiet kid, and nice.

I told him, "Hank and Rex are leaving me, Spec, and I suppose you will, too."

"Why should I?" he asked.

"I'm leaving the big time," I said. "I'm going out to where the corn is green."

"Outlaw tracks?" he said.

I nodded.

His voice was low. "That's where I got the bug. That's why I went to M.I.T. I used to watch them all, at Spring Meadow."

"I used to drive there, when I was younger," I said.

"Don't I know it? Didn't I watch you? Barney, that means we won't be held by the Association regulations any more, doesn't it?"

"Sure, why?"

"Oh, I was just thinking, is all. Who you getting to take Hank's place, and Rex's?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'll find somebody. I'm—awful glad you're sticking with me, Spec."

I didn't blame Hank for leaving. Hank was right about the wrists and his age. But Rex I'd helped to make the big time. Rex I'd brought along like he was my son, avoiding the flat tracks and the junker fields, taking no chances with him. Because I could see he was championship material, and I wanted him up there, where he belonged.

Now he was up there, and one of my weapons was missing. With Rex's name I could have fought the Association on that appearance money. Without him, I was just another barnstormer.

I had the equipment, a pair of 250 cubic inch D.O. fours. I had the mech. But the driver's the big third in that combination and I didn't have one.

I got a couple of boys, finally. One old-timer, Red Newton, and a new kid, up out of the midgets, Al Kruger. We opened at Seaside, in Florida.

It's a half-mile layout, at Seaside, but the field was pretty classy. Some of the

boys were down there for the winter and they had their mills along.

There wasn't any appearance money, not at Seaside, and the boys would be out to win. Red and Al tried out the D.O.'s as soon as we unloaded them.

Red had the scarlet job, to go with his hair, and Al had the black one. Otherwise the cars were twins. Red wheeled his out first.

There isn't any kind of surface Red hasn't driven, nor any length oval. He took her around, breezing for a couple laps, and then he poured the coal to her.

There's nothing classy about Red, but he's got wrists like the Atlantic cable and more guts than he needs. He manhandles a car, and takes no man's dust he can help.

Spec was standing next to me as we watched him, and I thought Spec was muttering. I looked at him, and his lips stopped moving.

Red came in, and we pushed Al out to a start. This was Al's first experience with the big irons, and I was a little leery of him. He was just a kid, and that was twenty thousand dollars' worth of car.

I didn't have to worry any about the car. Al breezed, like Red had, for two laps, and then Al continued to breeze.

Red said, "Is he going on a picnic? Where'd you get him, Barney?"

"Out of the midgets," I said. "He was midget champ in the middle west last year."

"Light foot," Red said, and spit into the dust. "No moxie in that monkey."

Spec muttered something again, and both Red and I looked at him. Red said, "You say something?"

"I was thinking out loud," Spec answered. "I was thinking that perhaps Al realizes what an investment Barney has in that D.O."

"He's not going to get any investment back at twenty miles an hour," Red said. "Never saw a mech yet that didn't worry more about the equipment than he did about the pilots."

Spec didn't answer him. Spec pulled up the bonnet on the red job and looked at the motor. There wasn't anything there he hadn't seen a thousand times before, but that's a mech's way of ending a conversation, I guess.

AL CAME in, and he was smiling. "Lot of iron," he said. "She's got me jittery, yet, but I'll get the feel of her. Don't like to rev a bus until I get her pattern."

Red looked at me and shook his head. Spec looked over at Al as though he knew what Al meant, and Spec nodded like he was agreeing.

Down the track, a new job was being unloaded, a sleek and glossy mill that had class you don't often see in the minors.

Spec said, "That's Rex down there, isn't it, Barney?"

It was Rex, all right, and he was supervising the unloading of the new one. Rex is a careful kind of wheeler, and Spec had always thought a lot of him.

Red said, "He kind of gave you a bad deal, didn't he, Barney?"

I didn't say anything.

"Too big for his britches, the way I hear it," Red went on. "Well, this is the kind of layout to see if his backbone matches the car."

The car was yellow.

Al said, "Number two in the Association, last year. What's he doing here?"

"No conflicting dates," I said. "The Association is kind of lenient, if their dates don't conflict with the outlaws."

Red was smiling. He said, "I always wanted to tangle with that guy—with the proper equipment."

Spec said mildly, "You've got the equipment, now."

Red looked at him, and at me. "Never saw a mech that liked me, yet," he said, and shook his head.

They ran a fifteen, two twenty-fives and a fifty on Sunday. I had a car in each of the first three and both cars in the fifty. Red's yellow front drive was in the fifteen and the fifty.

I let Al handle that one. Al had been getting better all week, and I liked the way he was shaping up. He was on the inside, in the second row, and Rex had the pole.

Flanking Rex was Joe Studener. Flanking Al was Gus Harney. Oldtimers, both, and rough men on a short track.

But they didn't have the mills. On the first turn, Rex went out in front and stayed there. Al got past both Gus and Joe in the backstretch and settled in the groove about twenty-five feet behind Rex.

For thirty laps, for fifteen miles, that's the way they ran, smooth and easy with no challenges. I could tell from the crowd's silence that they didn't like it.

Spec looked happy, but Red said, "Parade. And no music."

Al came in, looking pleased with himself, and I didn't disturb him with any criticism. Second to Rex isn't bad, for a newcomer.

In the twenty-five, Red had the pole and not too much competition. But he brought the crowd to its feet, time and again. He had that scarlet buggy screaming, and he laid down a barrage of grit you could have planted corn in.

I saw Spec scowling, and I asked him, "How's he look to you?"

"Like a semi-pro outfielder," Spec said. "He makes them all look hard, even the easy ones."

"Red's been around the tracks a long time," I said.

"Too long," Spec answered.

He'd sure had a change of character this past winter. I'd never before heard him criticize anybody.

I said, "You unhappy about something, boy?"

I thought for a second he was going to say he was. But after a few seconds, he said, "No, of course not, Barney." Then he smiled at me. "I'm always happy around this kind of equipment."

Red was in the second twenty-five, too, and he got some competition in this one. Gus Harney had his jalop singing for this one, and the two of them made a personal battle out of it.

The crowd came alive, and I did too. They were hub and hub through the stretches and just one big cloud of dust on the bends. Glancing down into Rex's pit, I saw he wasn't missing a minute of it.

Red won, by ten feet, and the crowd gave them both a terrific hand as they idled in, a lap later. Red was grinning like a twelve-year-old.

"Some mill," he said. "And I really milked her, eh, Barney?"

"You sure did," I said. And then, for some reason, I looked over at Spec.

He was checking the water cans. You wouldn't know we were alive.

I didn't like it. When one of our boys wins, I like to see the pit gang go over with a good word. Al made an O with his thumb and forefinger, but Spec just yawned and leaned against the fence.

Red had the pole in the fifty. Rex flanked him, and Al was in the second row on the inside again. They came down on the flag at a little higher pace, this time, and the scarlet job jumped with the signal.

Rex stayed right with him, and they went blasting into the turn like a couple of maniacs. I gripped the fence and held my breath.

Red had the groove. Red was inside. When he started to slide, on the bank, Rex gave him clearance, and the front drive started to swing. It was one of those free-deck swings.

Rex caught it in time to keep him from the timber, but not in time to save any ground. My scarlet baby led them all into the backstretch.

Red poured the foot to her, and spanned

that backstretch like a meteor. When he came sliding into grandstand alley, every fan in the stands was on his feet, and the applause came down like thunder.

I said, to anyone within hearing, "That's the way to wheel a hot iron."

The only one within hearing was Spec, and he made no answer.

"That's what the fans like," I added, "and it's the fans who pay the freight."

No response.

"Reminds me of Milton, the immortal Tommy," I said.

And now Spec said, "I saw him once. I was six years old. I saw him at Spring Meadow." He was almost whispering. "He was a great driver and a great competitor. But those days are gone, Barney."

"Not for me," I said. "What's different now?"

"The equipment's better," he said, "and the pilots are smoother. More head and less foot."

"And appearance money," I said. "The public pays just to *look* at them. Like in a private zoo."

"Why not?" Spec asked.

"If you felt that way," I said, "why did you come along? I thought you felt like I did about appearance money. Why'd you come along?"

"Two reasons," Spec said, "and the main one is because I like to work for you."

I started to ask him what the other one was when the crowd screamed. I turned to see the scarlet buggy go into a complete gilhooley on the south turn.

HOW RED saved it from the timber, I don't know. But he came to rest in the piled dirt of the upper track, and he was starting to gun it out already. Though not until Al and Rex went by, below.

By the time Red was under way again, Rex had more than a half-lap lead.

Red went out after him, and Red had almost forty-nine miles to catch him in. I thought he was going to do it. In the next twenty miles, he picked up most of the ground, and that scarlet job had never sounded sweeter.

But the gilhooley had weakened the right rear rubber, and he came in to have that changed. It was another win for Rex, with Al chasing him home, just like the opener.

Red was coal-black when he idled in. He was scowling, and his eyes were hard. "I'll get him," he said. "Next Sunday, I'll get him."

"Sure you will," I agreed.

Nobody else said a word.

TUESDAY, Spec and I really worked over those twins. They'd sounded all right to me, but Spec wasn't satisfied, and we sweated over them all day.

Then, before knocking off, Spec climbed in behind the wheel of the red one, looking self-conscious. "I'll try her out," he said.

"You're not licensed," I said, and then remembered.

"This isn't an Association track," he said quietly. "There's no eye test needed."

That was his second reason, and I knew it, but all I said was, "Breeze her, boy."

I watched him idle out into the turn, and felt kind of funny. I was getting awful dumb as I got older. He'd seen Tommy Milton when he was six. He'd been born and brought up next to Spring Meadow. He must have seen all the great ones there. He'd gone to M.I.T.

But he couldn't pass the vision test for the Association.

Wheelers are a dime a dozen but a mech like Spec comes along once in a generation. That I could tell him, but it wouldn't do any good, I knew.

Tommy Milton had been blind in one

eye, with only two-thirds normal vision in the other. But they hadn't found it out until he was through, until he'd hung up records from coast to coast. You couldn't get by with that today, not in the Association.

I watched him breeze the scarlet buggy, and it was clean work, free and smart, without sway or strain. He knew what was going on under that hood, and he knew how to use it without show.

A couple times around and I gave him the time lap signal and put the clock on him.

She sang like Bing, that lap, and I could see the work had done her good. The time wasn't any new record, but two fifths of a second less would have been.

He came in, and I said, "Beautiful. But I never fired anybody yet, and I've got no kick with Al and Red."

He nodded. "I know." He sighed. "And next year you'll be back with the Association."

"Like hell," I said.

He grinned at me. "Sure you will, Barney. That's where you belong, in the majors."

I ignored that. I said, "Try and get along with Red, huh?"

"All right," he said, "but what that man does to a car—"

"Nobody," I said, "could do anything to a car that you couldn't fix."

Red didn't get Rex, like he'd promised, on Sunday. Red won, but Rex wasn't in it. Rex was up at Lantona, where they'd offered appearance money.

We went out to Texas, and did all right. Al was getting the feel of it, and not many of the sane ones wanted to tangle with Red. We had the equipment and we copped three quarters of the purses.

It wasn't enough, not quite enough. The outlaws were dying; they'd died with Sloan but I'd been too bull-headed to admit it.

We went up into Jersey, and that's where we raced on Memorial Day. It's a long way from the brickyard, Jersey is.

I bought a paper as we were leaving the track, but it was an early edition, and I didn't get the real news until we got back to the hotel.

Rex had won the five hundred, in the front drive.

The kid I'd brought from Horner's Grove had won the big one. And I hadn't been there to see it.

Spec looked at Rex's picture on the front page and at me and he said, "I'm sorry he won."

"You always liked him," I said.

"Last year, I liked him," Spec said. "Well—next year—"

At these prices, I thought, there won't be any next year. But I said nothing.

We went down to Baltimore and then out to the middle west. We hit Springfield and Gary and Dubuque and St. Paul, winning more than our share, and not clearing a dime.

In St. Paul, I got a letter from the big little guy, from Indianapolis:

> . . . missed you at the five hundred, and so did everybody else. We know what the game owes us. When we saw Rex come home on top, we knew what he owed you, too, even if he doesn't. Grow up, Barney, and come on home. . . .

An appeal from a three-time winner is something a man has got to give some thought, even a bull-headed old coot from the wrong generation.

I gave it some thought.

I called the boys in, and showed them the letter. Red said, "That's where the moola is. But it's up to you, Barney."

"Check," Al agreed.

I looked at Spec, and he seemed to hesitate. Then he said, "You belong in the Association, Barney. That's the cream."

"That means," I said, "we'll miss

Spring Meadow. That's the big one, for the outlaws. I'd hate to miss that one."

Spec was looking at the floor. Then he went over to look out of the window. He didn't say a word.

I said, "We'll go down to Spring Meadow. We can decide there."

IT'S a fine oval, well maintained and financed, with a great tradition. Stan Helgeson runs it, and has for forty years.

I saw him in his office, and he shook my hand off, almost. "Giving you a lot of ink," he said. "The great Barney Keller team, including the local wizard, Arthur 'Spec' Allen. Red's with you, too, huh?"

I nodded. "You do all right without the Association, don't you, Stan?"

He shrugged. "I make a living. But I'm getting Association sanction next year. Have to keep up with the world, Barney."

"I suppose," I said. "I got a letter from Indianapolis last week."

"So—" He was frowning. "You mean, you're not going to show here?"

"I've seen some of the posters you've got out," I said. "I wouldn't want to make a liar out of such pretty posters."

He smiled. "Same guy as always, aren't you, Barney?"

"Not quite," I said. "Who else is running, Hank?"

"All the big boys." He looked at me sideways. "And the big one, Rex. A grand he gets, for appearance money."

"A grand—to run third? That's heavy sugar."

"Third?"

"After us, he's next, maybe. Maybe he won't even finish. Why should he?"

"I'm just a businessman," Stan said, "and he brings them in."

I went back to the hotel, and all three of them were waiting for me in the lobby. Al said, "Spec wants us out to the house for dinner."

Spec said, "I want my folks to meet you, Barney, and Al and Red, too."

"What are we waiting for?" I said.

Chicken, with dumplings, and giblet gravy. Home-made bread and apple pie and spiced preserves and country-style coffee.

And two of the nicest people you'd want to meet, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, parents of the local wizard, Arthur "Spec" Allen.

Mrs. Allen said, "You've taken good care of my boy, Mr. Keller. Such a dangerous sport, and I was so worried about him—"

"You don't have to worry about Arthur," Mr. Allen said. "Arthur won enough races right here at Spring Meadow to put himself through M.I.T."

Spec said quietly, "I'm not a driver any more, Mom. You don't have to worry about me."

Red looked around the room, started to say something, and decided against it, I guess. Al sort of coughed, then said, "Spec's the greatest mech in the world, bar none."

"He led his class, at M.I.T.," Mr. Allen said. He looked uncomfortable, too.

We sat on the porch, after dinner, talking about some of the races they'd run here, and some of the names, going way back. Mr. Allen's memory was remarkable. He knew more about the races I'd run here than I did.

Spec didn't have much to say, through it all. As we were leaving, he said, "I'll sleep here tonight, if we're staying in town, Barney."

"We're staying," I said. "I've promised Stan we'd run."

Red and Al and I got into the Caddy, and Red said, "I guess I figured that Spec wrong. Though we been getting along all right lately."

"He's a good boy," I said, "and I'm proud to have him with me."

"Rex is in town," Red said. "He'll be in the race."

"He's getting a grand, appearance money," I said, and coughed.

"Red," I said, "I've known you a long, long time. You've always been aces, with me. Though I never really put you to the test, until now."

"What gives?" he asked. "What do you mean—test?"

I told him what I meant.

When I'd finished, he said, "Sure . . . I was young once, myself."

That's how come Spec qualified the red baby. And won the pole. A hundred miles, this melee was, for the non-Association dirt track title. Stan's big enough in the game to call it that and not have anybody laugh.

Lot of Association cars there, too, because Stan was coming in next year, and they can use him as much as he can use them. Four of the first ten in the five hundred were there, including Rex.

Kelly Barnes and Joe Lawlor were there, and they've won more dirt-track titles between them than there ought to be. But Spec still held the pole.

Rex flanked him, Al tailed him, and I had a hunch we were going to see some action.

The stands were bulging, and then I saw a gent coming through the infield with a tag in his lapel. Mr. Allen.

"Arthur fixed it for me. It's all right, isn't it, Barney?"

"Glad to have you," I said.

Spec was climbing into the red baby, and Mr. Allen went over to wish him luck. Spec had special goggles; he'd had them since he raced here.

Red said, "Me, a grease monkey. A man of my professional standing."

Al climbed into the black buggy, and started to fuss with his helmet. Spec waved me over.

Spec said, "Thanks, Barney. I'm going to run this one your way. I'm going to make you glad you gave me the chance."

"My way?" I said.

"I'm going to take you back twenty years or so," he said.

"You be careful," I told him. "Mr. Allen, tell him to be careful."

"I've been telling him that all his life," Mr. Allen said.

Then they were being pushed into the lineup and the motors were coughing, and the pacemaker car came along, the starter furling his green flag.

HOT IRONS and hot pilots and a banked mile of flawless dirt. Not too hot, not too sunny, and maybe this would be the swan song of the outlaws, as far as the big money went. There weren't many promoters left like Stan, who knew how to put on the flash.

I patted Spec on the back and went back to talk to Al.

Al said, "Me and Spec, we're going to battle this one out."

"Good boys here, and fast cars," I said.

"Me and Spec," Al said. "Hang onto your hat."

Things change, but not youngsters, especially not cocky youngsters with a couple hundred horses underfoot.

The parade started and the smell of oil was biting and the musical thunder echoed off the stands and went pounding through the infield. Flame, here and there, and little spurts of dust, as they swung into the backstretch.

Mr. Allen said, "I always get a kick out of this part."

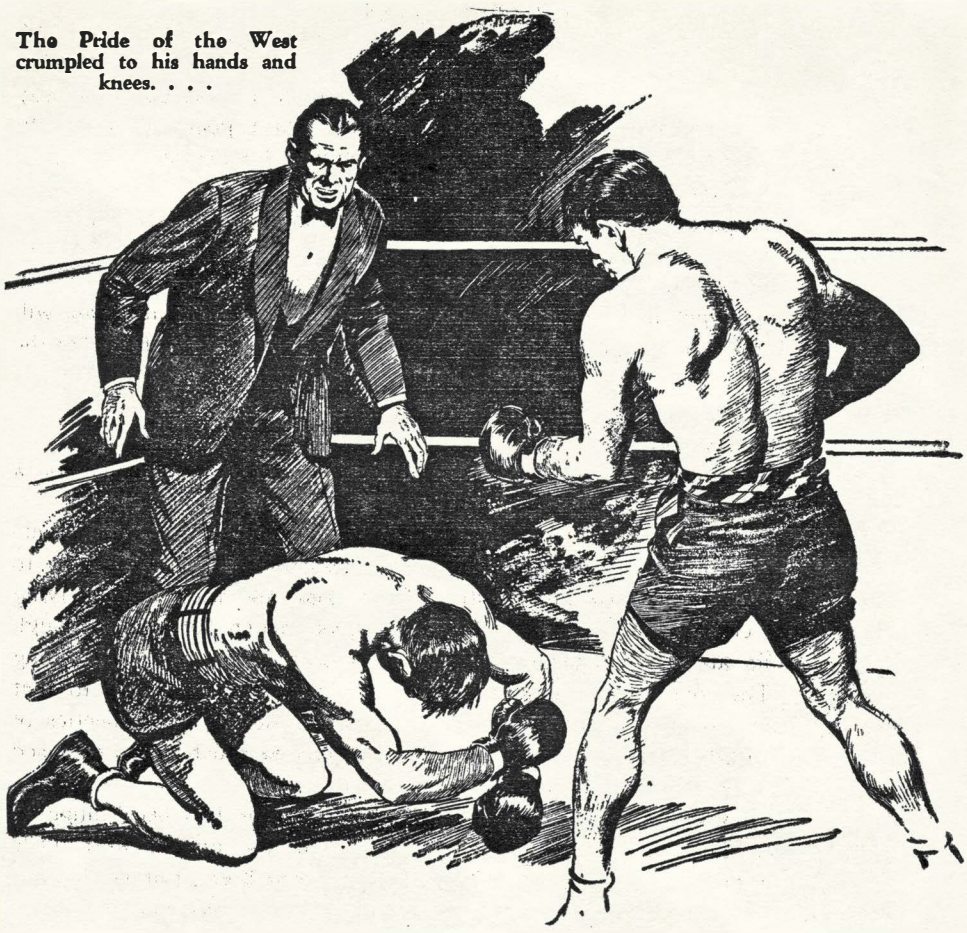
"Me too," I agreed.

Around the north, now, and into the payoff alley, the red job on the pole, the black one directly behind it. Mr. Champ flanking the red job, and maybe he would try. Who knows?

The flag raised, the stands up, the pace higher.

The flag dropped, and the pacemaker swung to the outer track, and there was a sort of sigh from the stands.

(Continued on page 128)



The Pride of the West crumpled to his hands and knees. . . .

THE DURABLE DANE

By SAM D. COHEN

IF JIMMY BRITT had cared less for fine clothes he might not have lost his title of "white lightweight champion of the world" to Battling Nelson.

One afternoon Nelson saw him coming down Market Street, San Francisco, in a top hat and frock coat. Nelson was standing in a cigar store. He wore a battered felt hat and a sweater that came down over his trousers, with a five-carat diamond stuck into the sweater.

At that time Nelson was not considered championship material; he seemed no more than a good second-rater. He had lost eleven fights, though he had never been knocked out. He was not a "finisher." He was just the "Durable Dane," capable of taking plenty of punishment,

The fighting heart of the Durable Dane was a curiosity only to scientists—no man who ever faced his lethal hook in the ring ever questioned it!

and of traveling along almost any distance without signs of distress.

"So that's Britt, is it?" remarked Nelson to a bystander as Jimmy trod along, twirling his cane, admired by the afternoon Market Street parade of matinee girls. "I have a notion to step over there now and knock his block off—the dude! Those clothes certainly get my goat. If that's what you call the lightweight champion he's my meat."

'Twas ever thus. From earliest youth Jimmy's insistence on his own preference in clothing and deportment had led to fisticuffs. At fifteen, helping his father in the plumbing shop in Oakland, Jimmy did his work in a high collar, a three-inch choker which, in some miraculous manner, he always kept clean while handling the screws and bolts and wrenches and pipes of his trade. The boys in the neighborhood who saw him coming to work in that regalia took violent exception to it.

The first afternoon when Jimmy's right to wear a high collar was questioned, he licked seven of them. The next afternoon three more, tougher and bigger, stepped in his path and mocked him. Jimmy disposed of them also, one after another; knocked them out clean and cold. After that no one made any remarks about "dudes" and their apparel, at least not in Jimmy's hearing.

In time Jimmy became amateur featherweight champion of the Pacific coast. As he grew in pugilistic fame his collars grew taller and his hats higher. When he graduated into the professional ranks he bought a dress suit and, the first time he put it on, looked as if he had been born in it. He heaped further contumely on the sporting profession by parting his hair in the middle, speaking with careful reference to the rules of grammar and by refusing to employ words of one syllable when words of five or six syllables would do the job half as well.

At length he was recognized as the best lightweight then performing, bar one, Joe Gans. And still there was only one way to get Jimmy Britt's goat. That was to refer slightingly to his manner of dressing or parting his hair.

That afternoon on Market Street someone turned over Bat Nelson's remark to the exquisite lightweight champion and the reply was: "If the young man will proceed to achieve a reputation so that the administering of a lesson to him may become professionally worth my while, I will then show him that, in the ring, my action is not impeded by a collar or a coat."

It was early spring. Nelson was bothering the promoters of San Francisco to give him a trial, and they were striving to find a good match for him, a tough second-rater, lacking in science but strong of body and willing of fist. Up to that time Nelson had despised the niceties of boxing skill just as much as he despised fancy dress.

For eight years he had been plugging along, mostly in the middle west, little better than a rough-and-tumble fighter, but with dogged courage and great endurance. He had the gifts of a champion though they were not yet apparent, but he had none of a champion's skill. Moreover, he didn't propose to learn.

However, one slow afternoon, when it seemed that he could not get a match with anybody, he sat in the rear room over a roadhouse and watched Joe Choynski spar with a young heavyweight. The youngster was rougher and bigger and stronger than the slim veteran, and it looked as if one punch from him ought to annihilate the wispy old hero of the ring.

Yet, suddenly and without any seeming effort, Choynski dealt a deadly blow. The young heavyweight dropped his arms, rolled his eyes and fell to the floor, where he writhed in agony for fully half a minute.

Nelson was powerfully impressed. He

sought Choynski and begged to know the secret. Then Joe taught him what, after months of practice, Nelson developed into his celebrated "left half-scissors hook," the blow that won him the championship and converted him from an awkward second-rater into a model first-rate boxer.

First Choynski brought out an anatomy chart and taught Nelson the location of the liver. Then he showed him how to deliver a glancing, twisting blow on the tip of the liver. Such a blow, if placed at a moment when the abdominal muscles are relaxed, sends agonizing pains throughout the nervous system, and, if of sufficient force, will temporarily almost paralyze a man. The spot of maximum effectiveness is about half an inch under the lower right rib and two inches toward the middle from the side.

The blow must be sent in twisting and downward from the right, and therefore it can be given only with the left hand. A straight blow with the back of the fist has no extraordinary effect. It must be a glancing blow with the heel of the fist, or, better still, with the thumb or forefinger.

As a matter of fact, this left half-scissors hook comes perilously near to a violation of the rules, which prohibit "gouging and back-heeling." However, the liver is certainly above the belt and a man skillful with the hook usually places it with a swing of a few inches and a simple twist of the wrist so that neither the referee nor any of the spectators is likely to know whether he hit with the back or the side of his glove.

AS HE practiced this blow Nelson found that nature had curiously equipped him for its triumphant delivery. He had always been a good left-handed fighter, but now Choynski pointed out to him that his left elbow had a crook, a deflection from the normal which naturally turned his left hand in an inch or more. This may seem a trifling matter, but it becomes vital in the swift height of the action, when a wary, determined, skillful opponent is contesting every move. And with such masters of the art of boxing as Jimmy Britt and Joe Gans, a change of pose of even so much as an inch would be instantly noted and accounted for. But because of the crook in Nelson's left elbow, he would never telegraph his knockout blow.

It was while he was learning this trick that Nelson was matched with Martin Canole, who the year before had made a very good showing against Britt, though he had lost the decision.

Canole was such a favorite in San Francisco that the odds on him in the betting over Nelson were four to one. And in the first five or six rounds of the fight, it looked as if the odds were justified, for Canole made Nelson look foolish.

But in the seventh round Nelson managed to land the left half-scissors. Canole crumpled, fell into a clinch, and barely managed to last out the round.

As he came from his corner for the next round, Canole did not know what hit him, but, like every other fighter who later faced that fatal hook, he instinctively tried to foil it by keeping Nelson on his right side in coming out of the clinches. For another ten rounds Canole managed to evade an accurate placing of the hook, but, in the eighteenth, Nelson got another chance. Then it was all over. Canole fell and lay limp as a rag while he was counted out. A minute later he was as right as ever but unable to tell what had happened to him.

Still, the promoters did not think Nelson a good enough drawing card for Britt. Instead, they matched him with Eddie Hanlon, formerly a champion and still a formidable opponent. Nelson put the hook into him in the nineteenth round, and Eddie was counted out.

Nelson claimed that now he was surely entitled to a meeting with "the dude,"

but Britt replied, through those who made the overtures, that, "All he possesses is a lucky punch. If he can gain a decision over Herrera, who knows more about boxing in a minute than he will ever know, and if he can then beat Young Corbett, who is a better slugger than he will ever be—then I may consent to the consideration of a contest with him. Until he has accomplished that he must remember I am the champion and cannot afford to meet second-raters."

Aurelia Herrera was a Mexican cowpuncher from the Montana ranges. He smoked black cigars and drank much whisky, but in the ring he was sly as a wildcat and he hit with piledriver force. In Butte they offered $3,500 for a Labor Day fight of twenty rounds between him and Battling Nelson. This was more money than the Battler had ever received for one bout and he jumped at the chance. Only a year before he had been employed in Herrera's training camp at ten dollars a week.

In one of the early rounds Herrera drove his fist downward on Nelson's head with such force the Battler sank to the canvas, but he was up within ten seconds. Then Herrera lifted him with a blow in the pit of the stomach which hoisted him through the ropes and into the lap of a spectator. Again the Battler returned to the firing line in less than ten seconds.

Shortly after that Nelson landed his hook. It did not stop Herrera, but it took away his aggression. Something unexpected, something entirely foreign to his experience had happened to him. He slowed up right then, and for the rest of the fight was wary and on the defensive.

Though Herrera did not know what had hit him he remembered, as had Canole, that it had come out of a clinch, from the left side. It felt almost like a foul blow, but Nelson had not stooped; he had apparently given little force to his blow. It was as baffling as a jiu-jitsu twist.

The fight went the full twenty rounds. At the end the referee gave the decision to Nelson, and no one complained. For the last three quarters of the distance Herrera had been plainly stalling, and the points were overwhelmingly for Nelson.

Then, in the fall, came the last thing that stood between Nelson and a match with the champion—a fight with Young Corbett. It was in the last days of November in Woodward's Pavilion in San Francisco. Corbett had been the champion only a short time before, and he had lost his championship to Britt, not by a knockout, but by a decision on points.

For the first four rounds of this fight Nelson, as usual, got all the worst of it. In the fifth round he landed the left half-scissors hook.

Corbett was a tough fellow and very game. Moreover, Nelson had not been perfectly set for his first delivery of the wonderful blow and it merely made Corbett grunt, but, from that moment, he began to crumple. Yet he fought desperately and to the onlookers it seemed, until the ninth round, as if it were still Corbett's fight.

Corbett had a way of insulting his opponents in the ring with a running fire of comment. He began this on Nelson in the fourth round. Nelson, of placid temperament, was slow to rouse. But as the rounds passed, Corbett's taunts became more bitter and more profane.

In the tenth round, while in a clinch, Corbett whispered into Nelson's ear, hoarsely, "Say, kid, I thought you were a hitter. Why, you couldn't dent a charlotte russe."

Nelson's face flushed. He slipped out of the clinch on the left, and then, like a snake, whipped in his deadly half-scissors hook.

Corbett bent over double but his knees refused to give. Nelson hauled back with his right and aimed for the jaw, which he could not reach. A man at the ringside

yelled to Corbett's seconds, "Jump into the ring, you fools, and save your man from being killed!" Then the referee stepped in and stopped the fight.

Just as he raised Nelson's arm, Corbett crumpled and sank in a heap to the canvas. It was a minute before he recovered possession of his faculties.

THERE was no question now about Nelson's ring reputation. "The dude" would have to fight. It was less than a month later that Britt and Nelson met for their first encounter of twenty rounds.

Britt's manager was his brother, Willus, a shrewd, peppery, volcanic bundle of nerves and vitality. Later Willus was Nelson's manager, and still later Stanley Ketchell's.

That year when Battling Nelson was climbing the last rung on the ladder to the championship, Willus, who sensed what was coming, camped on his trail. He saw every one of Nelson's fights, and after each, he came back and told Jimmy what he saw. That curious, inexplicable hook did not escape him. He noted it carefully and it worried him. He told Jimmy that, above all, he must not let Nelson leave his clinches on the left side, and that his right side must never be unprotected.

Finally they faced each other in the ring: the tough Dane from Hegewisch, Illinois, where he had peddled meat and licked the boys who called him "towhead," and the suave Irishman from Oakland, where he had carried plumbing tools for his father and licked the boys who called him "dude."

The fight went twenty rounds to a decision. Twice Jimmy went down for the count of nine, but he had escaped the full effect of the hook, thanks to the warning of Willus and his own elusiveness. Nelson never left his feet, but he was bloody and battered and fully outpointed.

The next morning he began a campaign to get Britt into the ring with him again. First, he secured another fight with Young Corbett. This time the Denver lad lasted only nine rounds before the hook relieved him of his will to conquer. Then ensued six months of dickering and manipulating with the Britt boys.

Finally, the date of the second contest was set for California's Admission Day, September 9th, 1905. The fight was to be for forty-five rounds at Colma, and the two fighters were to divide 65 percent of the gate receipts, 39 for the winner, 26 for the loser. The winner's share amounted to $19,000; the loser's nearly $12,000.

Britt lasted for eighteen rounds in that second fight. He managed to hold his arms in and protect his body for seventeen rounds. Then, in the eighteenth, Nelson forced the fight so fiercely that Britt lost his caution and proceeded to mix it with his rushing antagonist.

This was what Nelson wanted. He was never good at distance work. "King of the infighters" was his sobriquet—earned, though few realized the fact, by his deadly half-scissors hook. The moment Jimmy opened his arms and rushed at Nelson to swap punches evenly, bang went the thumb and forefinger of his left hand into the tip of Jimmy's liver, twisting, gouging, wrenching. Jimmy straightened, dazed, then rushed more wildly than before; another thump into the liver missed; but Nelson landed blows over the heart, over the lungs, over the stomach. Finally came the real opening he wanted. The champion was now thoroughly weakened, his abdominal muscles relaxed, his keenness of eye gone, his defense practically abandoned. He had only one wild hope of landing a decisive blow on Nelson.

As Jimmy came in, arms open, Nelson sought the clutch, with a blow in the jugular. Then he deftly welched out on the left side, and, as he did so, brought his

left thumb and forefinger down with all his force on a spot that would have been covered by the upper right pocket in one of Jimmy's sporting vests.

It was all over. The Pride of the West crumpled to his hands and knees and then flopped over on his back, out cold.

Nelson was champion.

Yet, between him and clear claim to the title stood Joe Gans, one of the cleverest boxers that ever stepped into the ring—the Old Master. Gans could hit anyone he ever faced when and where he pleased.

It was just a year after he won the championship from Britt that Nelson gambled his laurels with Gans. It was at Goldfield, Nevada, on Labor Day, 1906, and Nelson received $23,000 for his share of the contest. It was to be a finish fight. George Siler was the referee.

ABOUT dusk, after the sun had disappeared over the hills, and when the fight had progressed to the forty-second round, something happened in that Nevada ring which resulted in one of the first great disputes of pugilism. Gans fell, writhing with agony, and calling, "Foul!" After a moment's hesitation Siler awarded the fight to Gans, disqualifying Nelson for fouling.

What had happened had been only a monotonous repetition of every Nelson fight in the last two years. Coming out of a clinch he had placed his left-scissors hook squarely on the tip of Gans' liver. He had not been able to do it properly before because of the colored fighter's craft. Gans may have honestly thought that he was fouled, and it was so dark that Siler doubltless was unable to see distinctly.

However, if there was any doubt as to who was the master it was settled for all time two years later, settled twice—once on the Fourth of July and once on Admission Day in San Francisco. Each time Nelson knocked Gans out, and with the identical blow which had disabled him in Goldfield. But at neither time was there any question of its legitimacy.

When at length he was recognized, without question, as the real champion at the 133-pound limit, Nelson cast up his accounts. He had always kept his books as carefully as a bank cashier, and could tell to a penny what he had earned and what he had spent each year and each month of his life. He found that his purses for twelve years of fighting amounted to $121,486.80. In addition he had received nearly as much from theatrical engagements. Most of it had been invested and he was worth close to a quarter of a million dollars.

He became one of the wonders of the prize ring. Physicians examined him to discover in what way he was physically different from other men. Most of them missed that crook in the left elbow; it seemed so trivial.

What they did discover was the abnormal rate of his heartbeat, an average of 52 beats a minute. The norm for the adult male is 72. His blood was in perfect condition and his organs perfectly nourished, but his heart beat only five-sevenths as fast as that of the men he faced.

Not only that, but Nelson's heartbeat, though stimulated by fierce exercise, recovered its normal rate four or five times more quickly than did that of most men.

Only constantly repeated trials in the ring lessened the curious resistance of that extraordinary nervous system. Battling Nelson had participated in over a hundred fights before he finally fell.

Though Nelson was not knocked out in that battle, the referee stopped the fight after forty rounds. It had been a one-sided affair after the twenty-fifth, and when it was all over Ad Wolgast left the ring with the palm that Nelson had won from Britt and Gans—had won and held with a method that no champion had used before him, and that, probably, will never make a champion again.

TROUBLE PLAY

By LANCE KERMIT

Home-run titan, or bush-league freak? The answer, for big Terry Whelan, was burning across the plate—in the single last-chance pitch that spelled nine guys' destiny—or one rookie's sure ticket to Limbo!

THEY had always been derided as "the Pantin' Panthers." They finished in the second division for ten straight years, most times no higher than sixth. Then, in desperation, they made Pete Porter, their long-time first baseman, a playing manager.

Pete was getting grizzled, he admitted, staring into the mirror of his cubicle off the dressing room. Outside, the Panthers were getting ready to play the Lions and the air resounded with their banter and chatter. Pete was through; he faced that. But he had brought the Panthers up there and they had clung on. They were still the Pantin' Panthers, but now they were panting on the heels of the Lions.

He had beaten them to a state of fight and frenzy, he had clobbered the ball for a .340 average to lead them up from slavery; now he was finished. He sat and awaited the new first baseman, the college kid the desperate Panther owners had signed. All he knew about this boy, this Whelan, was his size. He came big, they hopefully told him. He could knock a ball, they said. In the Interstate League he had been hitting .356 in his first season out of school. But Pete had never heard of this league.

He was going higher than eyes could believe. . . .

There was a timid knock on the door. Pete nursed his bad knee with heavily veined hands and said, "Come on in."

The door opened, then filled with young man. Pete Porter's eyes opened wide. The young man's shoulders spread interminably. His head almost topped the door-frame. He shuffled into the room, his face solemn, boyish, a round face with china blue eyes staring at Pete. He wore a checkered sports jacket and voluminous slacks, and brogues at least a size sixteen.

"Kid, they made you an out-sized unie, but I doubt you can get into it," said Pete weakly. "How the hell did you grow so big?"

"Well," said Terence Whelan, "it runs in the family."

"You got brothers as big as you?"

"Patrick is bigger. So is John. But Hercules, he is about my size, only he outweighs me," said Terence Whelan.

"Hercules!" breathed Pete Porter.

"He's a rassler," said Terence. "Just starting. Mister Porter, I'm scared. I'm no star first baseman, Mr. Porter. Honest, I'm not ready for the big time." The words came in a rush. The round, youthful face was pink, the blue eyes worried.

"Kid, you put on the suit," said Pete Porter. "You go out there and hit a few. I'll decide whether I can play some more or whether you'll do."

"And the Lions have got Hap Grogan," the kid almost whispered.

"You can say that again," nodded Porter. "He's held them up there. Best pitcher in ten years."

"Best ever lived," choked Terence Whelan. "He's—he's my hero. Mister Porter, I'm no first baseman."

"Now don't be scared of Grogan. Just because he got unlucky and skulled Cuozzo—"

"I couldn't *hit* Grogan," said Whelan.

"I know about him, about his flutterby ball. Mister Porter—"

Pete Porter felt his temper leaving him. He snapped, "Don't be a big baby. Go stuff yourself into a monkey suit and show me what you've got. G'wan!" There was a quality in his voice which made men jump. It worked on Whelan.

Alone, Porter nursed his knee. "A screwball giant," he muttered. "He should be with Brooklyn. On top of everything else I get me a clown to keep me warm." He wondered if the knee would possibly hold him up until they could swap Whelan for another first baseman.

He went out on the field and there was Whelan. The outsized uniform hastily procured in advance was too tight. Arms and legs bulged and the visored cap perched precariously atop Whelan's skull, leaving blond hair to the breezes. Porter stood and stared.

Whelan was taking his licks. The Panthers were standing around in vast delight, watching. Over in their dugout the Lions, those rowdy, fighting muggs, were hooting and screaming. Doxie Keller called over, "Poor old Pete! He done give out and they hired a geek to fill in!"

Paskow was hurling batting practice. He stuck a fast one in there about waist high. Whelan, using a narrow stance reminiscent of the Babe, moved a big leg, swung his bat. There was a loud explosion. The ball disappeared over the right-field wall.

Silence fell upon the Lion bench. The Panthers stared joyously at one another and then Slater, the scrappy Panther second baseman howled, "How you like *that*, Doxie? The geek's bad, huh?"

Paskow threw some more, took a sign from Pete Porter and chucked several curves at the giant. Imperturbably, without glancing around, his young face intent and expressionless, Terence Whelan whammed each pitch to the far corners of the field.

Pete Porter yelled, "That's enough. That's plenty."

He retired to make his lineup. The Panthers took the field. They were a fast-talking, patchwork outfit of fading veterans and green youngsters, held together with courage, speed and Pete Porter's driving skill and enthusiasm. Porter lined them up: Carey, l. f.; Holden, c. f.; Bitzig, r. f.; Whelan, 1 b. (If only the kid could get hold of one per game, just one, with that easy power, he prayed. He was suddenly excited. He had never really believed they could win the pennant against Grogan and the Lions. Just one of those long ones per game, with a man on base. . . .) Jarrett, s. s.; Houston, 3 b.; Acton, c.; Miskin, p. (and how long would Miskin last today? Who could he use for relief? What a life! Sore arms, wildness, everything assailed his pitchers. The hitters had to do the work. And the Lions had Grogan.)

He looked up at a shout. Bitzig had made a low throw. Whelan reached for it, fell off the bag. The ball rolled away. Pete Porter groaned. Still he had not expected a gazelle on first.

The fungo hitter knocked a ground ball down to first. Whelan, went after it, all thumbs. He stumbled. The ball went into right field. Whelan turned and looked mournfully after it.

Pete Porter barked at the trainer, "Get that fish-net mitt from the locker room." He poised a pencil over the lineup. His knee twinged. He set his jaw and left Whelan's name on the roster. He cursed the scout who had presented him with this problem. It was too late in the season to train this boy to field acceptably. It was too late to do anything but pray.

HE HAD limped to the plate and delivered his lineup to the umpire before he remembered that Terence Whelan was mortally afraid of Grogan. He glanced at the Lion lineup and listened to Doxie's ribbing. Grogan was pitching, all right. A win today would mean a tie for first place, with the Panthers meeting the tail-enders during the ensuing weeks while the Lions played the first division teams.

He walked back to the bench. He could yank the kid and stagger out there himself if he had to, he thought. He looked at the big blond kid and was surprised to see no real fear or panic in the blue eyes. The kid just looked a bit awkward and out of place. There was something strange about the pleading in Whelan's gaze. It did not mean that he was scared to play, Porter realized.

The kid said once more, "Mister Porter, I played first in the Interstate League. But I'm not a first baseman—"

"Do what you can," said Porter with sudden kindness. "Stop the ball with your chest—it's big enough. Smother it and cover your bag. Houston will handle any doubtful grounders—he's fast. Just stick in there and take your cut with that bat."

The kid wheeled and went onto the field without another word. He certainly was big—about six-seven, Porter guessed. He would weigh a good two-thirty or forty. Yet he was well proportioned. He was no sideshow freak. Porter tried to remember the name of the college the boy had attended only last year. Teacher's Institute? College of Teachers? He had never heard of it, either.

Well, it was a screwball season. Pete had kept the Panthers in the pennant fight, but he himself could not tell how. And now only he knew how close they were to the breaking point. Going on nerve and fight, the men themselves were not aware of it. They soon would be. Pete cursed himself for being the first to wear out. If he could only have stayed in there, he thought, the miracle might have occurred. But his age and the injury to his knee had taken their toll. He could pinch-hit, he fiercely avowed to himself. He could hit that damned Grogna.

Grogan was also a big man, but lean

and greyhound-built. There was a streak of meanness, of coldness in him that made him a great competitor. He was the best left-hander of his day, there was no doubt about that.

Porter stopped worrying about Grogan and began to fret about Miskin.

The latter was toeing the mound. The Panther chatter was brisk and confident. The big new kid joined in automatically, his deep young voice carrying to the bench. Miskin raised his arms. Lane, Lion second sacker, waved a stick. The stands were crowded, the sun shone brightly, the game was on. Pete Porter chewed his gum, tense and glum.

Miskin was stylish. He was a right-hander, a potential twenty-game winner this year, but he was frail. He looked too tiny out there, facing the Lion hitters. He threw every ball with everything he had.

He got Lane on a grounder to Slater, who tossed right into the big fish-net mitt Porter had provided Terence Whelan. It seemed to Porter that Lane had merely met the ball, knocking it on the ground as hard as a half-swing would allow. It would be just like Doxie to use that strategy, attempting to cause errors by the rookie first sacker which would upset the entire Panther team.

Morgan also slashed one into the dirt. Jarrett made a fancy stop in deep short, uncorked his arm and the ball sailed low and wide. Whelan hastily stretched. The ball got away from him. Morgan laughed heartily, safe at first.

Porter groaned. It had been a wild throw, but he could have handled it with ease had he been in there. Now Jackson would get a rap after Handy, and Jackson was the Lion slugger and Miskin had always been his cousin.

Miskin struck out Handy. Jackson carried a big bat to the plate. Jarrett walked in a circle, kicking dirt, half-blaming himself for the runner on first, Porter knew.

Miskin threw with all his courage. Jackson waited for the full count. Then the Lion left fielder took his cut at a curve ball, got it on the end of his stick and knocked it deep into right. Whelan turned lugubriously to watch it bounce off the wall. Morgan came home with ease. Jackson pulled up at third. Miskin gritted his teeth and fanned Rubin.

The Panthers trotted in. Porter met them. He said to Jarrett, "You couldn't

help it. Good stop." He said to Whelan, "Kid, it was a tough throw. Jarrett was hurried."

"I'm no first baseman," mourned Whelan.

Porter said, "Stick in there, kid." He went to the third-base coaching box. One run was no catastrophe against his slugging Panthers, but he hated to give away anything. And today it was Grogan. The Panthers might knock any other hurler out of the box, but Grogan was the king.

It was Carey, Holden and Bitzig. Grogan sneered at them, spat tobacco juice and did not seem to work very hard. He was so big and rangy he just fogged the ball past them. They went down, one-two-three. Porter returned gloomily to the bench.

It was a bitter shame, he kept telling himself. They had worked so hard to stay up there in the race, they deserved better. If only his pitching staff was a little stronger, he thought, they could still make it. Maybe with a day or two of rest he could get back in there and play first. . . . He knew this was not true. He was above all else an intelligent man. He was through; his old muscles might carry him an inning, two, three—but he could not stay in there and run and move around.

Miskin, hurling on with skill and nerve, made the three Lion batters in the second inning hoist flies easily gathered by the outfield and Porter took a breathing spell from worry. Terence Whelan was up to start the second for the home club.

The kid had the heaviest and longest bat in the rack. He was standing in the box, staring at Grogan. His gaze was so intent that the great pitcher called to him, "See any green, busher?"

Whelan seemed startled by the arrogance of Grogan's tone. He grinned foolishly and stepped to the plate.

Grogan immediately fed him the fireball in close which is the initiation of all rookie hitters. Whelan staggered back and almost fell. He looked very ridiculous, waving his huge arms and legs to maintain his balance.

From the coaching box Porter howled, "You hit him and I'll murder you, Grogan, you rat!"

The umpire waved his arms. Grogan sneered at Porter. Then he threw another one inside and Whelan flinched a little and it went for a strike.

Porter trumpeted, "Knock it down his throat, kid. Take him right off 'at mound."

Whelan gripped his bat. He seemed somewhat dazed. Grogan exercised his elbow and a zooming curve nipped the outside corner. It was two and one.

Porter begged, "Take a cut, kid. Drive it in his teeth."

Grogan was laughing out of one corner of his hard mouth. He wound up and went through the motion of throwing his swift. A knuckler, his special "flutterby" ball drifted toward the plate, seeming to hang in the air, then taking its amazing dip. It was the pitch that had made many a slugger look foolish. It was aimed cleverly now to destroy any confidence the green boy might feel about hitting the master pitcher.

Terence Whelan brought his bat around. The sound was dead as bat met floating ball. The sphere took off and towered, almost out of sight. Grogan jerked around, eyes bulging. In deep center Handy began running.

WHELAN wasn't too slow, either. It was impossible to tell where the ball would land, in or out of the park. It was too high. Porter had never seen a higher fly ball.

Handy, a great fielder, turned. His back against the wall, he cupped his hands. It seemed a long while, but Handy, bracing himself, reached and grabbed. The hard-hit ball became just another out. But Grogan, staring, had nothing to say.

Whelan stopped running and plodded past third base. Porter heard him mutter, "I'm sorry, Mister Porter."

What the hell?

Did the kid lack fight? If he did there was no hope, Porter realized. Grogan went on pitching and for a moment Porter thought that Whelan's hit had shaken him, as Jarrett walked. But Houston hit into a double play and the inning ended.

Miskin went back to work. He fiddled too long with Grogan, a hitting pitcher, and walked him. Then Lane rapped one down to Jarrett, another deep one. Jarrett fumbled it. It went for a hit and both men were safe.

Porter signaled the bull-pen. He had old Marfield or he had Castor, but he needed Castor for tomorrow and Marfield's arm could do with more rest. If Miskin could only go the route—

Miskin, game as a fighting cock, made Morgan hit into the first to second. It was on the hit-and-run and the play was at first and Porter held his breath. Slater fielded the ball fast, took his time. The throw was low, but in there. Whelan bent his huge frame. The ball stuck in the net of the mitt.

Porter wiped sweat from his brow. Man on second and third and one out. . . .

Miskin gritted his teeth and struck out Handy. The redoubtable Jackson strutted to the plate. Miskin threw to him with all he could muster and got the count to two and two. Then he tried to sneak a courageous curve past the big hitter.

Jackson nailed it down the first-base line. Porter died on the bench. It was a high liner, ticketed for two bases.

The crowd suddenly yipped. Six feet seven of young first baseman was going higher into the air than eyes could believe. The fish-net stuck out. Whelan came down to earth, staring at the glove with the ball caught in the web.

For the first time the kid grinned. His face beamed like a noon-day sun. He took off the mitt, kissed it reverently and placed it carefully on the grass. Then he trotted into the dugout as the fans rose and cheered him at every step. Doxie was bellowing, "Lucky—lucky—lucky," over and over again but the rookie did not deign to glance at the Lions bench.

Grogan wound up and delivered his "flutterby". . . .

Porter said, "Now you're goin' in there, kid."

"It was your mitt," said Whelan carefully. "The ball sticks good in it. Im no first baseman, Mister Porter. I'm—"

"Just stay in there and get some hits for us," said Porter. "You'll do all right." He hoped the boy would do all right. He agreed with Doxie that the catch had been lucky—but he'd take a

lucky man over a clever one any time.

The Panthers hustled to the plate—and were hustled away by the brilliant Grogan.

Miskin gave up a hit in the fourth but got out of it without allowing a run. Miskin was working like a Trojan behind his one-run deficit. Grogan, invincible, made the Lions hit to fielders or struck them out in monotonous order. Whelan hit a terrific grounder in the fifth as Grogan again stubbornly fed him the flutterby ball. Fast fielding got the kid out. Careful throws prevented any further errors on Whelan's part. But in the sixth inning the trouble began.

Jackson led off for the Lions. This time he drove one of Miskin's select pitches far over Whelan's leaping stretch. It rattled against the wall for a double. Porter phoned the bull-pen.

Miskin braced up and struck out Rubin. Porter relaxed. Miskin was coming through in the clutch. Then Opper, the Lion third sacker, lammed one down first-basewards, a skipper with a big hop.

Whelan lunged for it. He got his thick chest in the way. The ball bounced away. Jackson went to third. Opper made first.

Porter died again. However, Miskin was not to blame and he could not take him out, not under the circumstances.

Sanders walked. That filled the bags and left the situation open for a double play any way it came. Hock, the catcher, was up.

And Hock hit a ringing single off the first pitch!

Jackson came in. Opper scored. It became 3-1 on the huge scoreboard in center field. Porter came charging from the dugout toward the forlorn Miskin.

The infield gathered around. Porter said, "I'd better get Marfield in here. But the way things are going, the way Grogan is pitchin', I dunno."

"My arm," said Miskin sadly. "It's tired. Too much work. If we only had one more pitcher, one strong-arm."

"Yeah," said Jarrett, sadly. "Miskin needs a rest. Geez, this is tough." He carefully did not look at Whelan, whose error had added so much to the dismal situation.

They all had some muttered comment to make. Then there fell a small silence as Porter stalled and the umpires looked at their watches and the Lions cat-called and hooted.

Like a small boy who can no longer conceal his guilt, Terence Whelan blurted, "Mister Porter. I can go in there."

Porter started. He said, "What? Are you crazy? This is the big leagues, kid. This ain't the sandlots."

Whelan twisted the fish-net mitt out of shape in his ham-like hands. He said painfully, "I tried to tell you. I was only fillin' in at first base in the Interstate—"

"This ain't the Interstate League!"

Whelan said stubbornly, "I know. But I was a pitcher in college. They never beat me, Mister Porter. You see, Grogan was always my hero. I studied pictures, saw him in spring training, down in Florida. He—well, Mister Porter, you haven't got anyone else. And I'm a terrible first baseman, Mister Porter!" He was begging, Porter suddenly realized. There were tears in the blue eyes. This shy, half-scared kid was begging to pitch against the team which had just batted the Panther star hurler out of the box.

The others were open-mouthed. Jarrett muttered, "It might be a gimmick. We could use a gimmick."

"What the hell, he's so big," said Miskin. "He must be fast."

Acton, the aging catcher, said, "You know signs, kid?"

"One for a swift, two for a curve and I hit your glove," said Whelan eagerly. "Gimme one chance, Mister Porter."

Maybe it was the blue eyes. Maybe it was the way the kid had tried, staying

in there when he was obviously no fielder. Maybe it was desperation and the knowledge that this game was, to all intents and purposes, lost while Grogan pitched so superbly. Anyway, Porter shuddered and said, "Gimme that mitt. Miskin, you take a shower and go home and go to bed . . . Okay, start this damn ball game. What have we got to lose?"

NOBODY understood it. The fans shrieked. The umpires looked dubious. The Lions rocked with laughter and joy, knowing now that the Panthers had at last folded up.

There was a Lion on first, one on third and Grogan was the hitter—Grogan who was Whelan's hero and could bat. The kid went to the mound and fingered the ball. Porter limped around first base and watched with eagle eye.

Whelan took his practice pitches. He had, suddenly, a style. The lumbering first baseman was not graceless on the mound. There was deliberation, know-how in his motion. His long, log-like arm seemed rubbery. His practice throws went solidly into Acton's mitt. The old catcher yipped, "That's the way t' *throw.*"

Porter felt the beginning of excitement deep down in him. Grogan, sneering, advanced to the batter's box. Whelan, watching the base runners, toed the rubber.

There was no waste in his style now. The arm went back, came over. It went through naturally, with a nice follow-through. The ball sped plateward.

Grogan suddenly jerked back, windmilling. His curses filled the air. "You bean me, you big, dumb rookie and I'll kill you!"

The umpire said, "Stuh-rike one!"

Acton chortled, "Stand up and watch the ball break, sucker!"

Grogan wheeled on the umpire, then got hold of himself. He settled at the plate. Whelan, stony-eyed now, threw

again. The ball diminished to pea-size, cut the corner of the slab.

"Stuh-rike!"

Grogan shook his head in rage. He crouched, narrowing his eyes. Whelan reared back, his big foot went up, he pitched. The ball came waist-high. It looked like a sucker throw. Grogan pounced, swinging. The ball hopped viciously into the air. Grogan missed it by a foot.

Porter said, "Oh, my!" He was weak with amazement.

Lane came up. Lane was smart and tricky. He smiled pleasantly at Whelan and fouled off the first three pitches. Whelan looked solemnly over at Porter. He threw a couple of sneakers that just missed the edge of the plate. Lane nodded, still grinning. The count rose to three and two.

Lane stood loosely in the box. He would just meet this one, Porter knew, trying to shove it past an infielder, sending in one run at least to sew up the game. If he put the fat wood on one of Whelan's fast balls. . . .

The kid leaned back. It was the usual kid stuff, Porter thought uneasily, the pride in strength, the belief that the fast hop would get past any mortal man. Whelan pitched.

Lane started to swing at the speed. Then he half-checked.

The ball did a couple of fancy things. It had no speed at all. Porter could see every stitch on it as it went down the alley. Lane weakly hit at it. A pop fly rose merrily over first. Porter took one step on his good leg and gathered it in.

The kid walked off the mound. Jarrett and Salter raced in and hugged him from either side. Houston waited at third to escort him to the dugout. When Porter got in there old Acton was saying, "Kid, that was a lulu, that change-up. Scared even me! Kid, where'd you learn to pitch like that?"

Porter snapped, "Get some runs, dammit. Get on base! Get killed—anything—but get on base." His heart was hammering. Slater hit Grogan's first pitch. Lane gobbled it and threw Slater out. Acton hoisted a long fly, but Jackson caught it. Porter took his game leg up there.

Grogan's stuff was hopping, he saw at once. Grogan never tired. He had a no-hitter riding, a perfect one, with only one walk given up. He bore down and Porter had to hit a twisting flutterby ball, and he almost got it into the stands at that. Jackson had to run hard and take it over his shoulder. The Lions seemed to have all the luck that day, too.

It was Morgan, Handy—and Jackson against Whelan in the seventh. Porter talked it up and Jarrett and the others chimed in, staccato. One thing about his boys, thought Porter with warm pleasure, they never quit.

Whelan took his full wind-up for the first time. The kid looked like a pro, Porter marveled. The fast one went in.

The smack of ball in glove could be heard all over the park. Acton wrung his glove hand and grinned as the ump called it a strike on Morgan. Whelan took the ball, examined it. He was no longer a bumbling puppy. He was a serious, blond young man and even the cap which was too small did not look comical, yanked over one ear.

He threw again. His speed was blinding—and it was increasing. Porter realized that with none on the kid was now really opening up, laying the swift in there. Acton called for a sponge to use inside his mitt. Porter shuffled his bad leg and uttered words of praise and cheer while his mind went around and around.

A rest for his pitchers if this kid was no morning glory. . . . Miskin would be great with more rest. . . . Sore arms could mend. . . . This boy could work often. . . .

Morgan never did see the third pitch.

It went past him letter-high and almost knocked Acton off his feet.

Handy came up. Whelan, taking his time like a veteran, fogged three curves past Handy. Then it was Jackson.

Whelan looked a long moment at Jackson. Acton gave him the sign; he nodded. He wound up and threw a slow, wide curve. Jackson took his full swing. The ball came on a line for first.

Porter leaped and grabbed. He held on and the side was out. He ran in and said, "Kid—you're terrific."

"Jackson hits down the line," nodded Whelan seriously. "He's a fella murders speed. Right, Mister Porter? Y'see, Mister Porter, I'm no first baseman—"

"You're leadin' off," said Porter.

Whelan took the big stick. He minced to the plate. It occurred to Porter that this strange young giant did not look awkward with a bat in his hand, either.

Grogan was angry. The prideful star hurler had been deeply injured at Whelan's cavalier treatment of his batting prowess. He hurled two curves past Whelan with great eclat. Then he missed the corner with a couple which Whelan impassively watched go by.

Then Grogan suddenly threw his curve. It looked as though it were going to strike Whelan in the ribs, and it broke neat and round as a jug handle for the inside corner.

Whelan seemed simply to turn around —but the meat of the bat connected.

The big boy streaked for first. The ball ran past Lane and into center field. Whelan slammed into second base and the shortstop gave the heavy churning legs plenty of room.

Porter was up and screaming. "Now we go! Pin back his ugly ears! Get that Grogan outa there!"

Jarrett walked. Grogan began fussing with the rosin bag. Porter howled until he thought his larynx would burst. Gro-

gan settled down and Houston struck out.

Then Slater, fighting grimly, picked on a flutterby ball and knocked it to deep short. Whelan slid safely into third. The sacks were filled.

Acton strove mightily to get the ball out of the infield, but Grogan was equal to the occasion. He got Acton on a sneaker curve. Porter, gripping the bat until his fingers ached, went up there.

GROGAN fooled around, taking his time. He glanced balefully at third where Whelan took a good lead. He did not dare risk a throw with two out and it seemed to gripe him.

Porter dug his spikes into the dirt. The fire inside him had grown. The kid—the strange circumstances—the way the boy had shown pitching form—

Grogan made up his mind. He threw the flutterby ball. It was his clutch pitch, it was hard to get a safety off it.

A flash of the kid laying into it the first time he was up came to Porter. If the kid had pulled that one a little it would have been a homer. Porter acted upon impulse.

He leaned into it with great care, pulling for the short right-field bleachers. He swung for the money, from away down the bat. He had all his shoulders, all his power into it. His knee buckled—but that was after he hit the ball.

He saw it go up, level out, as he limped down to first. He saw Whelan cross the plate as he turned the bag, still going slow. He saw Jarrett, Houston and Slater suddenly pause to caper in the baselines. Then he could walk the rest of the way. The ball went into the bleachers amidst leaping, overjoyed fans.

That made it four to three.

And that was the ball game. The Lions did not even threaten Terence Whelan after that. Four to three, with a fresh hurler tomorrow against the Lions' second-

best. . . . A win for the strange kid first time out and a new pitcher. . . .

In the dressing room Porter pleaded, "What's the pitch, kid? There's something screwy about this. And where, oh where, do I get a first baseman now? Because kid, you're right, you're no first baseman. You may be a hittin' outfielder some day, but you are no first baseman."

Terence Whelan was very happy. His round face beamed. He put back his head and laughed heartily. "I think things got mixed up, sort of," he chuckled. "Y'see they had me playin' first because my brother John was home on the farm, helpin' pa. Pa was hurt. I was in the army, y' know, and I pitched there some and I just had been discharged and I took John's place for a while. So they got me mixed up."

Porter held his breath. He said gently, "And where is John now?"

"Oh, he's outside, waiting for me," said Terence, off-handedly. "Now John's a real first baseman. And he can hit. Him and Patrick are here and Herk—he's the rassler. Patrick is a catcher, a very good catcher, too. They're *big* fellas—"

Porter was racing for the door, hobbling and hopping. He was roaring, "Where are those guys? Sign 'em, sign 'em quick!"

Porter shot through the door. Acton said, "Say, what's this about you idolizin' Grogan?"

Whelan eyed the old catcher. Porter was coming triumphantly through the door with three huge behemoths who were grinning from ear to ear. Terence said to Acton, "You know what? I don't like that Grogan after today. He's a great pitcher, but he's mean!"

Then he went to greet his three big brothers and explain to them about the mistake the scout had made—the greatest error ever made in professional baseball, Porter always said. . . .

FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 6)

"Parson" Davies took over Griffo's contract, and hired Charlie and Johnny Daly, two very tough boys, to keep him from drinking.

Davies arranged a match with Tommy Tracy, and ballyhooed it as the greatest St. Louis had ever seen. The Dalys stood watch on Griffo's training.

"I'm frightfully dry," moaned the Aussie. "Let me 'ave some 'ale first. I could drink a keg dry."

"The Parson said you weren't to have any," the Dalys chorused.

"Blawst the Parson. I'm burnin' up." The fighter ran out of the gymnasium at top speed, and the Daly boys had to chase him six blocks.

The night of the fight the Coliseum was jammed to the doors. And, for the first time since Davies took over the management of the unpredictable little man, Griffo evaded his bodyguards.

"Boys," said the Parson solemnly, "you've got to bring him here. Bring at least an arm or a leg, or we'll be lynched. Hire a hack, and get going."

The bell sounded. Griffo shuffled out, barely able to get his hands up. Tracy sprang forward and showered him with blows. The little Australian endured this punishment for ten or fifteen seconds. Then he turned his back, walked up the aisle, and disappeared. Parson Davies and the Daly boys followed at top speed.

That was not only the end of Young Griffo as a boxer, but of pugilism in St. Louis for a good many years.

Yours truly,
Clint Gaskins
Wilmington, Dela.

Well, Clint, we try to be as realistic as we can without being dull. In our last issue, for instance, we ran a story by William R. Cox, "Ten Count Terror", in which the hero was certainly not the kind of guy you describe. He had a face that scared babies and stopped clocks, in fact. And we've published many other stories about more or less unsavory aspects of the ring. But we believe our readers like to read stories about people like themselves—and that automatically rules out illiterates like Young Griffo. Thanks for your letter and the yarn; we enjoyed it.

And that winds up this session, chums. We'll be back month after next with more sports talk. See you then!

—THE EDITORS

(Continued from page 34)

old Benjy to get anyplace in this division. You don't have to do it twice."

"Kneeing, thumbing, kidney chops, laces across my nose, walking all over my feet! Get out of here, Benjy. You're dirtying up the place."

Benjy slid off the table. He had a hurt look. He walked toward the door. He turned and said, "Kid, you're a fighter. No?"

Zack was puzzled. He said, "I don't get it."

"I got my way. You got your way. If I made it easy for you out there, you get too big for your pants. I got to give you the same thing I give Steiner, Brock and Joe Canada. With me it isn't pattycake. It's a business. If I rough you out of the fight, you just don't belong up there with the good ones. So I don't see what you get all hot with me about. Good luck to you, kid."

He shut the door behind him. Max gave Zack an odd look. He said softly, "I never like to bust down confidence with my boys. I think a fighter's got to have a little bit of a big head. You had a lot, kid, but you never really showed me you got what it takes until tonight. Maybe you never even had what it takes until tonight."

He jerked his thumb toward the door. "That guy is a better friend than you know."

Zack moved uncertainly toward the door. He paused and shoved his hands deep in his pockets. He scowled.

"Go on!" Max said. "Stop pouting like a spoiled brat. Maybe you can catch him at the end of the tunnel."

Zack Haines yanked the door open and ran out. Benjy was a figure in the distance, walking slowly.

"Hey," Zack yelled. "Hey, you broke-down horse! Wait up!"

Benjy stood and waited for his friend.

FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 107)

The scarlet job seemed to jump as Spec barreled her. Rex stayed with him into the turn, and Rex had the car for the bend, that front drive. But Spec had the groove, and Spec held it.

He led them all into the back alley, and daylight began to show between him and the field, already.

"He's going too fast," Mr. Allen said.

"He's a smart boy," I said. "I can rely on him." But I thought, *He's going too fast.*

"What a wheeler," Red said. "What a cookie he is."

Into the north like a shooting star, and I couldn't figure he'd have enough traction, not for that pace. But he came out of it, and down the front lane wide open.

Leading the second car by two hundred feet. The second car was ours, too.

Me and Spec, Al had said, and he hadn't been kidding.

They went on, and on, making the rest look bad, and then Spec must have cut the pace, because Al began to catch up. Al came up to within striking distance, and now I could see the pace was slower.

Because the front drive was moving up on both of them. Rex was going to try, today, despite the appearance money. Rex came up, closer and closer.

And it started all over. The red job jumped, the black job jumped—and this time Rex came along. They went past the stands like one long car, making one hell of a racket. The ground shook.

He's taking me back, I thought. He's taking me back to the hippodroming days.

"What's going on out there?" Mr. Allen asked. "You'd think they were hippodroming it."

"They were," I said, "until Rex caught up."

"I haven't seen that for twenty years," Mr. Allen said. "If I never see it again, it

will be all right with me." He was pale.

And they went on, while I dug my nails into the palms of my hands, and tried not to let Mr. Allen know how I felt. Even Red was quiet, next to me, as though seeing something he couldn't believe.

At fifty miles, it was still a three-man battle. At fifty miles, those three had lapped all but Lawlor's car, and some of the laggards were already quitting.

At sixty miles, you could have put a blanket over the three of them, almost.

It was Red who said it, this time. "They're going too fast," Red said. "Every track's got a limit, and they're beyond it."

Well, Indianapolis was designed for seventy miles an hour, but even the first five hundred exceeded that. In 1911. I watched, and tried to breathe when I got the chance.

Then, at the seventieth mile, Rex quit. That's all you could call it. He had the third spot sewed up, by that time, and the tension of that crazy speed got to him. He dropped away back, out of the storm of grit and pebbles, back where the going was safer.

Al and Spec would slow, too, now, if they had any sense.

They didn't. They went on and on, at that maniac's pace. What did it prove, what would it get them?

Then Al began to slow, not too much, but enough to give Spec some elbow room. Al figured on racing some more . . .

And that was it. Spec didn't. Spec knew I'd be going back to the Association, and I knew he'd stick with me.

And I wasn't scared, any more.

His dad said, "Do you understand that boy?"

I nodded. "He'll be all right. You've got my word on that. He's the best in the world, and this is his last race."

Ninety-five miles, ninety-six, ninety-seven—and the fans didn't sit down

through any of it. Foot driving and head driving combined, and something more, the touch of genius. They were watching history being made. On the ninety-eighth lap, Spec lapped Rex.

He'd lapped everybody on the track but his buddy, Al, the second best driver in the world.

The last lap, there was some noise in the stands, a kind of suppressed whimpering, because there's only so much of this you can watch before your nerves go, and it had been sustained, all the way.

Then he was pounding down on the checkered flag, and the scream of that motor was almost too high for the human ear. I thought he was going to sail rigth through the south bend.

But he had control; he'd had control all the way.

He sure was a mess, when he came in. He took those goggles off, and he looked like a minstrel man. His teeth were white, as he grinned at me.

Al came in, and Al was grinning, too. "I'll bet you made it," Al said.

"I'll bet you did, too," I said. Then Red caught on, and he nodded.

"If you didn't," Red said, "I'll quit the game. And I ain't even forty, yet."

We didn't have long to wait for it, and while we were waiting, Spec said, "Al will cop, next year, at Indianapolis, won't he?"

"God willing," I agreed.

Then it came over the public address system, solemn and deep.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Arthur 'Spec' Allen has just established new world one-mile dirt-track records for every distance from one to one hundred miles."

"For the books," I said, and gripped his shoulder, and he smiled up at me, and then his dad came over to him, and about ten thousand others came over with the same idea.

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