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finishing sprint, Landy demonstrates perfect form: center of gravity directly over point of running, smooth drive from hips with

A MAN CONQUERS HIMSELF

Gentle John Landy, after one of history's fastest miles, could feel only sadness and defeat. Here is the story of an amazing, dedicated athlete—and an amazing human being

by **PAUL O'NEIL**

THE TOWNSPEOPLE of Fresno, California, Raisin Capital of the World and Pearl of the San Joaquin Valley, share one obsession: they are track and field fans. Kids in Fresno can recite the latest clockings in the 100- and 220-yard dash the way kids in Brooklyn recite baseball averages, and their elders—waitresses, ranchers, truck drivers and bankers—recall the feats of the great men of running with a pride and awe which is probably unique in the U.S. Last Saturday evening 16,000 of them—as many as could possibly jam past the gates of Fresno State College's little Ratcliffe Stadium and into its seats, its infield and the grassy areas around the ends of its famed, sand-colored clay track—were present there and garrulous with anticipation.

At 7:14 o'clock, give or take a few seconds, every man, woman and child of them were on their feet and emitting a pleading roar which must have been heard on the distant Sierras, for around the far turn at Fresno came Australia's John Landy, one of the loveliest runners ever born, floating like blown tumbleweed toward a new world record in the mile run. The air was chilly, although the declining sunlight still slanted brightly on the green grass and the motley of 1,400 athletes—now spectators almost to a man—who had gathered for the 30th running of the West Coast Relays. A plaguing wind was blowing down the backstretch in gusts up to seven miles an hour. But Landy, whose warm smile and shock of curly brown hair had become familiar to millions of newspaper readers and viewers during the two weeks of his U.S. tour, had built the foundations of a historic race.

He had been boxed momentarily on the first turn between ex-Occidental College Miler Jim Terrill and former Yaleman Mike Stanley. But he had slid clear at 200 yards, with Villanova's young Dublin Irishman, Ron Delany, at his heels, and from then on, running like some tanned Inca courier, he had steadily left the field behind. He had hit the quarter miles with almost absolute precision—59.9, 2:00.1, 3:00.8. Then, fiercely bent on penance for his one-yard defeat at the hands of his fellow Australian, Jim

Bailey, seven days before, he fled into the final lap with 57 seconds to go to break his own world record.

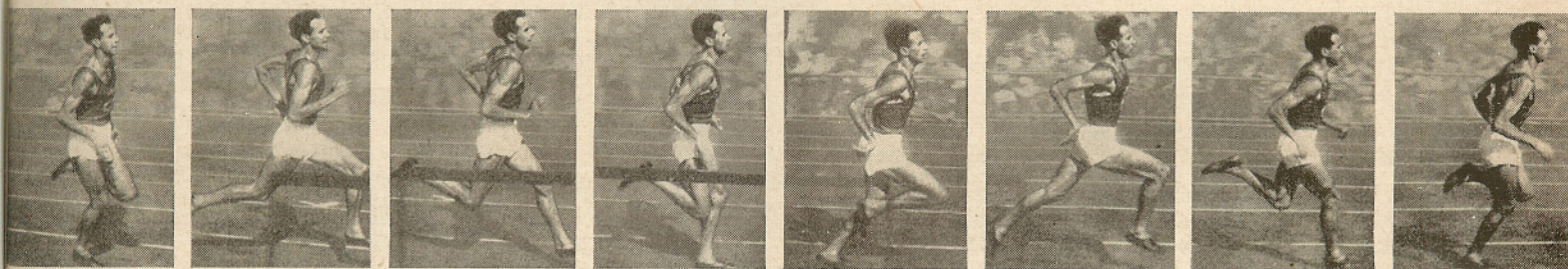
How was he doing? It was impossible to say. But the crowd, remembering that he had run 57.2 in the final quarter against Bailey in the Los Angeles Coliseum, urged him on with a steady, deafening torrent of sound. He was 35 yards ahead of Delany in the backstretch, 40 yards ahead as he lengthened his stride in the turn, and 50 yards ahead and running all alone as he came rolling down the stretch. He went through the tape with his style unflawed by weariness, and turned back, strolling casually, to find out the news. The time was 3:59.1—his sixth sub-four-minute mile, and his second in one week. He had missed.

He walked immediately toward an Australian radio man, waiting near the turn with a microphone. As he did so, his chest rose and fell laboriously beneath the green jersey of the Geelong Guild Athletic Club. But he took one last deep breath and then spoke almost as normally as if he had simply hiked the mile. He was bitterly disappointed. "It just wasn't there to give," he cried. "I had no sparkle in me at all. It was ridiculous not to have run 3:56. A near-record breaker—perhaps that's my fate. I'm disappointed. I know in my heart I can run better than that. It was just another run—a time trial—just another performance."

A little later, back in the red brick dressing room, surrounded by reporters he went on: "It may be that I've had too many hard races this year. In both cases here I doubt that I was running as well as in Australia, although I felt better tonight than last week. I was not exhausted at the end. I had the energy but I was just not getting it out. I was very strong." Had competition aided him in the race against Bailey in Los Angeles? "The competition," he said with a wry grin, "didn't present itself until it was too late to be of any use." He continued: "This may have been my last mile. I'll be running 1,500 meters before the Olympics, and I had hoped to give you a new record."

Thus ended one of the most astonishing and admirable adventures in the history of athletics in the U.S. And one,

continued on page 51



high forward knee lift, feet landing straight ahead with economical heel-to-toe roll, hips and shoulders square, head held perfectly

still, lack of tension in shoulder muscles and easy arm action. The hand flick of his trailing arm is a special Landy characteristic.

THE STORY OF JOHN LANDY

continued from page 13

in the minds of those who listened to him in Fresno, which was only dramatized by John Landy's unfeigned disappointment. In a single fortnight he had flown 9,000 miles from Australia to the U.S., had not only accepted a burden of press conferences, newsreel performances, radio shows and television spots which would have staggered a candidate for the U.S. Senate, but had won his auditors to a man with his poise, his patience and an articulate honesty.

In accepting, without reserve, the responsibility of serving as an "ambassador" for Australia and a sort of salesman for the Melbourne Olympics, he had virtually promised to run two four-minute miles in eight days. And, for all the nervous strain of his incessant extracurricular activities, he had done so—a feat without precedent in the annals of track. If he had been beaten by a jump in the surprising race with Jim Bailey he had also made the pace and thus opened the door of fame to his fellow countryman.

Landy is a complex human—an intellectual with a compulsion for the arena, and a stoic disregard for pain and exhaustion; a reserved and sensitive man whose mind is repelled, but whose spirits are kindled, by the roar of applause and the incandescent glare of publicity. The mile is much more than a race to Landy; it is, one gathers, almost a problem in esthetics. "I'd rather lose a 3:58 mile," he says, "than win one in 4:10." He has never betrayed by the slightest word or gesture anything but the utmost admiration for those who have beaten him. But he burns to win. "I'm vicious underneath," he said last week in a burst of almost apologetic candor. Then, lapsing back to understatement: "I'm terribly irritated when I lose."

Landy's career can be roughly divided into two sections—before and after his historic loss to Roger Bannister in the Mile of the Century two years ago. He was bruised by defeat at Vancouver. He had been running, literally, almost every day for four long years, and he suffered a massive emotional letdown. "Everybody beat me when I got home," he says. "A schoolboy beat me in a quarter mile. I could see no reason for going on. Running is not a big sport in Australia, and I had run against the best in the world on the best tracks in the world. At home I faced the prospect of running badly on mediocre tracks against mediocre competition in little

meets attended by three people. It was too much. Running is not a life; I had to quit sometime. I decided that the time had come to scrub it."

He became a schoolmaster. Landy, a graduate in agricultural science from Melbourne University, is probably the most famous alumnus of Australia's exclusive Geelong Grammar School. Geelong itself—an institution patterned rigidly after the English public school—is housed in a series of stately Georgian buildings not far from Melbourne. But four years ago, influenced by progressive educational theories evolved in Scotland by German-born Educator Kurt Hahn, it also established a remote branch called Timber-top, a cluster of rustic wooden buildings scattered through a great forest of peppermint gum trees in the Australian Alps. No formal sports are permitted at Timber-top and the patterns of scholastic existence are broken as much as possible; Geelong boys all go there for one year and are encouraged to be on their own in the surrounding wilderness. When Geelong's English headmaster, Dr. J. R. Darling, invited him to teach biology at this mountain retreat, Landy gratefully accepted.

PEACE, QUIET—AND BOREDOM

He could hardly have found a better place to rest, to lick his wounds, to contemplate his fate and assess his own nature. He found the life of a schoolmaster rewarding in many ways. But his first seven months were, in many other ways, "the low point of my life." He had forced himself, for years, to live a life of iron self-discipline and self-denial, but it was a life which involved gladiatorial excitement, enormous emotional strain and release, globe-trotting and waves of publicity and acclaim such as seldom wash over any but movie stars or heads of state. Now he found himself immersed in a quasi-monastic life without competition or excitement.

Landy has been fascinated, since boyhood, with Australian Lepidoptera and has spent many a day walking through open country looking for rare manifestations of moths and butterflies. He turned back to it, but his amateur entomology was, after all, only a hobby. And teaching demanded a degree of self-effacement which, he was surprised to discover, came hard to him. He missed the violent individual self-expression, the feel of combat,

continued on next page

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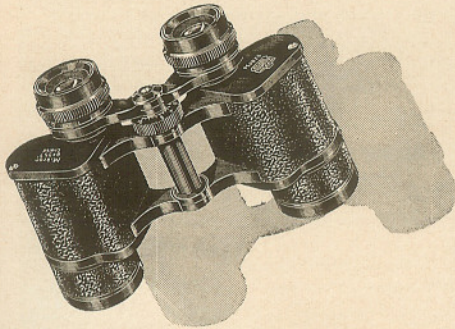


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THE STORY OF JOHN LANDY

continued from page 51

which, almost without his realizing it, the mile had been giving him.

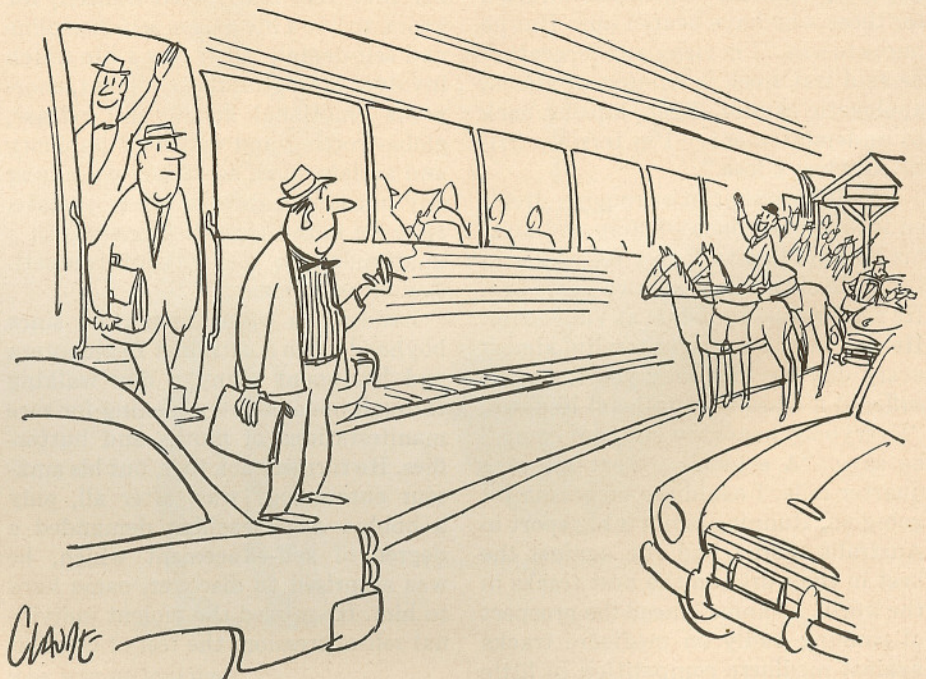
Landy had become a miler almost by accident. As a teen-ager he tried sprinting, and, at one point was clocked in a 10.6 hundred on wet grass, but he soon decided that the God-given talent needed for 9.4 was not his. Later, he seriously took up rough 18-man Australian football, as audacious a venture for a youth of 145 pounds as if he had set out to play American football against 200-pounders. But he concluded that he would never be among the top 16 men in the country ("I would have needed an extraordinary degree of agility against big men") and finally, while attending Melbourne University, attacked the mile. At first, feeling he had little talent, he was interested in it simply because he considered it an event at which he might become proficient through sheer doggedness.

But gradually it became a tremendous, a fascinating challenge to him. It was, he came to feel, "the human struggle" artificially contrived. "In any running event," he says, "you are absolutely alone. Nobody can help you. But short races are run without thought. In very long races you must go a great distance simply to be present in the laps that really count. But almost every part of the mile is tactically important—you can never let down, never stop thinking, and you can be beaten at almost any point. I suppose you could say it is like life. I had wanted to master it." But in the early months at Timbertop—although he

had retired as the world record holder—he could not shake the feeling that he had failed: "I could not forget the shock I got when I saw Roger Bannister whipping past me on the final bend."

For seven months Landy did no training at all, although he counteracted his restlessness with hundreds of miles of hiking through the mountainous country. But gradually he found himself attempting, sometimes on paper, to analyze the mile, to reduce the art of running to an essence and thus find where he had erred. He finally decided that the key lay in one simple fact: the race was run in a circle—or at any rate on an oval. "If you ran it on a straight it would be completely different. The circular track means it must be run in Indian file and the circular track divides the runners into the hunters and the hunted, the sitters who lie back and wait and the man who makes the pace. Every psychological aspect of the mile depends on that, and the man who sets the pace accepts a tremendous psychological disadvantage.

"All the responsibility for making the race rests on the pacer—the hunted. It is an exhausting thing, and you can only attempt to guess what is happening behind you and what is in the minds of the hunters. Of course, you can get a half-miler to make the pace for two laps and then drop out, but that is artificial. It is not running the mile. Or you can simply sit on your man—stay behind no matter how slow the race goes and wait. It is very comforting to do it—you can draw a bead on him and relax and sooner or later you will find a moment to attack him and if you do it at the right time you



will inevitably beat him. But I don't like slow miles. I wanted to run record times and win. And after I set the pace against Bannister it seemed that the two things would not be reconciled."

But couldn't they? What, he began wondering, was to prevent the hunted from exercising discouraging pressures on the men behind him? An even pace had always been the ideal. Why not make an uneven pace? Thinking back on his 50 competitive miles, he decided that there was a "dead spot" a thousand yards from the start—on the first turn of the third lap—a place where men tired, but did not yet have recourse to the exhilaration of the final battle for the tape. If the hunted pulled away at that point the hunters might never get within striking distance again. Making one bold move there, the pacer might inflict "a blow to the stomach," might turn the confidence of his pursuers to hopelessness.

TACTICS FOR THE BOLD

The very difficulty and dangerousness of the idea was stimulating. With sufficient flexibility, sufficient virtuosity, he thought it might be possible to run anywhere, even in a good field, to lie back if the pace was fast enough, to move up and lead if necessary, and still be dominant.

That would be true mastery. According to Franz Stampfl, the Austrian coach who gained fame at Oxford, runners are divided by nature into pacers and sitters, into runners and racers, and are incapable of filling more than one role. Landy decided that was "sheer nonsense." "A lot of people," he says, "believed I had no kick at the finish. I disagreed. I've sat on men and kicked them to death. The sprint at the end is only relative. It is a matter of acceleration rather than real speed. After all, Chataway is famous for his kick, and he can't run 220 yards under 25 seconds. I felt that if I could run the last 120 yards of a four-minute mile in 15.4 seconds I could win. I decided that I could run the first half mile more slowly, as slowly as 2:02, or perhaps even 2:03, save more for the finish and still run under four."

Landy began training again, and for the first time in his life discovered that he could enjoy running. There is no level ground at Timbertop; he simply put on old clothes and sand shoes (tennis shoes) and ran, uphill and down, around a wandering course through the trees for two hours every afternoon. As he ran he came to new conclusions about training and its objectives. A man who sets out to become

an artist at the mile is something like a man who sets out to discover the most graceful method of being hanged. No matter how logical his plans, he cannot carry them out without physical suffering. In his early years Landy performed chilling feats of toil simply to convert his body into the instrument he needed to satisfy his ambitions. In four short months in 1951 he cut 30 seconds off his time, brought it from 4:45 to 4:15 by literally running himself into a state of absolute exhaustion daily. "But that was as far as I could go until I saw Zatopek in the Olympics and learned that I had to have form as well. After that I got down to 4:02—and finally the record."

Landy still believes in massive doses of work. By the time he began anew at Timbertop he had already converted himself into a fantastically efficient running machine (the average man's lungs hold 4½ quarts of air and can take in 120 quarts a minute; Landy's, it was discovered in tests last week, hold seven quarts and can utilize 300 a minute. He has a "huge" heart and a pulse rate of 42 as opposed to the average of 60 or 70). With this background he felt that further "formal" training was unnecessary, that he should strive instead to strip away the impediments and artifices of civilization, to become a "running animal." The level of fitness in animals—in, say, a race horse—he thought, was higher than in humans even before the horse was trained. "Animals move constantly. There is no such thing as convalescence in the animal kingdom—a dog with a broken leg will not rest."

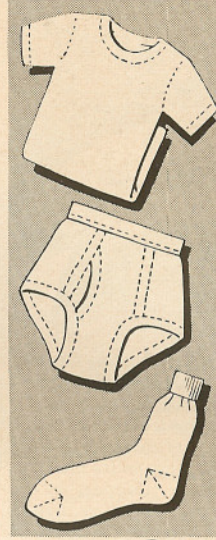
Landy felt that he would have been a better runner if he had been raised on a farm or had run through the woods as a child like Paavo Nurmi. Unfortunately his family had "not lacked for a shilling" (the Landys are well-to-do people, and the runner's father has the distinction of serving on the board of the Melbourne Cricket Club), and he led a conventional middle-class boyhood. He reflected with admiration upon the colored tribesmen—"those fellows from Kenya who ran at the Empire Games. They were not used to tracks or running shoes, and after they ran they must have been in agony. A trainer told me that if you touched their legs, spasms would run through their muscles. But they gave no sign of pain at all. They didn't even grunt."

For 10 months Landy ran, uphill and down, estimating his speed simply by sensing the energy he had used for

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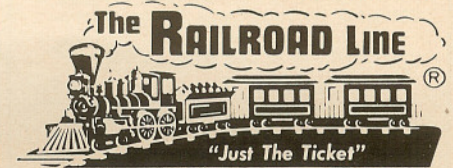
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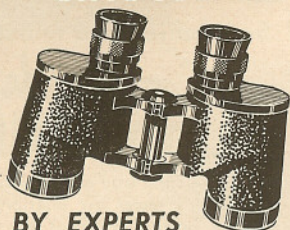
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THE STORY OF JOHN LANDY

continued from page 53

certain periods. He did exercises constantly "to bring up my speed." He refused to decide whether he would try for the Olympics or not. But when he came within inches of beating California's 880 World Record Holder Lon Spurrier in his first formal race, a half mile at Melbourne's Olympic Park last January, the die was cast, Australia rejoiced and the limelight and pressures of active competition engulfed him again.

FOUR MINUTES? IT'S EASY

Landy himself felt jubilant. Turning a half mile at the pace he had run meant that he had new speed to use in laying siege to the world's milers. When he ran the first mile of his comeback a little later he was doubly reassured. The time was 3:58.6. He felt strong at the finish. He ran an identical mile again in April. His 17 months in the hills had given him a maturity, a positiveness he had lacked before and, he was certain, a "basic performance" under four minutes—a professional ability to approach the record whenever he chose. He felt almost sheepish about it and still does. "I've been fooling the public," he says. "The four-minute mile is vastly overrated. It is just four times around the track. If I were doing this for a living I could run it twice a week. But that would just be a performance. It's winning in real competition that counts, and there's not much purpose in running if you can't keep running faster, is there?" For all this, he was full of hope that he could reach new heights. The reason: the Melbourne Mile, in which he had stopped stock-still in the third lap to see if a fallen runner named Ron Clarke was hurt.

"I stopped involuntarily. Then I thought, 'I've been disqualified.' Then I thought, 'No, no—I'm still in the race.' It looked impossible. Mervyn Lincoln (Australia's young 4:00.6 miler) and the field were 30 yards ahead. I was in a blind panic. I didn't think about time. I didn't plan. I just ran after them. How I caught them and won I don't know, but I ran the last 120 yards in 14.4 seconds. I was dead at the end. The time was only 4:04.2, but I reckoned the energy expended was equal to a 3:56."

At this point he was asked to make the U.S. tour. He was extremely reluctant to do so, if only because he would be "pressurized," would be forced, as a sort of theatrical performer, to run for

time no matter what the competition, and do so in strange surroundings, but Melbourne City Councilor Maurice Nathan, a wealthy merchant and a leader in promotion of the Olympics, all but insisted. Nathan, back from an American junket, realized Landy's popularity in the U.S. and also felt that Australia could never attract interest in the Games abroad simply by dispatching press releases. Landy finally agreed.

The pressure began in Honolulu. Reporters besieged him for a half hour after he got off the plane there; he gulped a quick lunch, held a press conference from 2 to 4 in the afternoon, made an appearance at a high school track meet, was interviewed on the radio and swamped by autograph hunters. He escaped with difficulty, went to the University of Hawaii campus, ran eight miles, drank some pineapple juice and hustled to the airport. He could not sleep on the plane. The schedule was more hectic in San Francisco the next day. He ran eight more miles after nightfall. In Los Angeles he went through the same routine. "If you don't get used to it," he said, "you just aren't good enough, that's all." But as the week wore on, he confessed to a leaden sense of "apprehension." He was appalled by the stone-hard surface of the Coliseum track, and at one point in midweek was fearful that he might not be able to finish a race on it. His weight sank from 146 to 143 pounds and he slept badly. He was more nervous, before the start, than he could remember.

NO GRAY—JUST BLACK AND WHITE

Afterward he doubted that either the track—which he finally conquered by filing his spikes short—or his schedule, which had provided "a compensating excitement," had affected his running. He refused to attach any significance to the fact that his feet were cut and blistered by his heavy training. "There is no gray—just black and white—in this injury business. If you're hurt badly enough to limp, you can't run at all. If you aren't, it makes no difference." But he was hard hit by Bailey's stretch victory. "Jim had a big day," he said. "He's improved tremendously; his style used to be prohibitive. I don't want to take anything away from him, but I doubt that he could do it alone, or that he could do it again right off [Bailey ran 4:06.4 last Saturday]. The point is—he has the equipment to do it. So has a lot of others. I'm mortally afraid, now, that nobody, including myself, has the

margin of superiority to be able to make the pace and win."

Yet if he was discouraged he kept it to himself after that moment. When Pete Rozelle, former public relations man for the Los Angeles Rams, who shepherded him through the tour, announced that Landy hoped to "relax a little" after the meet, a reporter cracked: "What does he do for relaxation—take a Miltown?" It was an unfair estimate of Landy's nature. He did just what any sensible man would have done after so difficult a week: he sat up rehashing his adventures, drank a few Scotches and went to bed with a mild glow.

Last week, with the heat subsiding, he proved himself a humorous and extremely sociable fellow, albeit one with a sardonic eye. When Shepherd Rozelle announced, amid a long-distance call to Melbourne, that Australian newspapers were reporting the tour on Page One daily, Landy muttered: "Sickening." As Rozelle recounted his ambassadorial triumphs, Landy marched up and down the room, grinning accusingly and lifting an imaginary pitchfork. He was fascinated by Los Angeles' speeding automobiles ("I keep expecting to see everybody in town arrested en masse") and by Los Angeles' radio advertising ("Henry Ford himself wouldn't have enough money to buy what I've been asked to buy in the last 10 minutes"). At Fresno when an Australian newsman reported, in some excitement, that he had just seen a real cowboy, Landy asked: "What's he look like?" Said the informant: "Tight blue jeans, cowboy boots, black shirt and a big hat." Landy broke in: "Oh, I know him—Wes Santee." He was outspoken in his disappointment after last Saturday's race, but once the post-finish questioning was through, Landy spoke no more about it.

"I had hoped to be able to pull out a big one," he said. "But right now, I'm going to have two hamburgers with French fries on the side. Perhaps I'll have a good go at racing in the Games." **(END)**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

11—U.P.; 12, 13—top, Loomis Dean; bottom, from Sporting Life (Australia); 22—drawings by Ajay; 23—A.P.; 24, 25—Jim McNamara—Washington Post, Robert Paskach—Omaha World-Herald, A.P.; 28, 29—top, Toni Frissell; middle, Massar and Hare, Fox Photos—London, Jerry Cooke, A.P.; bottom, Fred Lyon from Rapho-Guillumette; 31—map by Fred Eng; 36—Hugh Stovall—Atlanta Journal, A.P., Robert Phillips—Black Star, U.P.; 37—U.P., A.P. (2) Hy Peskin, Leon Callaway; 44—Mark Kauffman; 50—Owen Johnson; 64, 65—Combine; 66—69—Gordon Tenney—Black Star; 74—cartoon © 1956 Boston Herald-Traveler Corp.; 75—diagram by Fred Eng; 76—Dorothy Humphrey, Marylaid Wood and Lonnie Wilson.

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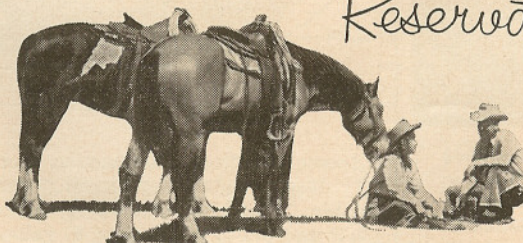
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