

The Scorching Spotlight

Accidents will happen, but it's tragic when a sports hero blunders at a crucial moment and the fans' cheers shift to jeers

By Grantland Rice

THE seamy side of modern sport is full of rough and cutting edges, for the higher men climb the deeper they must plunge if they slip. And there are few who don't take a tumble.

The path of the hero or headliner in sport is not always blanketed with violets and daffodils. This goes for almost any sport you can name—especially the sports that wander out beneath the great white spotlight of publicity, such as football, baseball, boxing and golf. When this spotlight beats down it can glare upon almost as much suffering and shame as the joy and glory it shines upon. For the average human would rather go goat hunting than lion hunting.

Fred Merkle made a somewhat careless blunder over twenty years ago that many others had made before him, but the crowd has never forgotten it because the lapse came at the vital moment of a decisive game. Many other well-known ball players had failed to run from first base to second when the winning run was scampering over the plate, considering the game over at this point. Almost no comment had ever been made about such occurrences until Merkle, one of the smartest men on the team, failed to touch second in a game that was to win or lose a bitterly fought pennant race.

That made the difference. And what a difference!

All through the last baseball season Hack Wilson, of the Chicago Cubs, had been one of the main factors in hauling and hammering his team along the winning path. His home runs, his hard hitting, his hustling and his general play had been a big factor in giving the Cubs another pennant. He was on his way to stand as one of the big heroes of the world series.



This spotlight's glare can cause as much suffering and shame as it does joy and glory

The Cubs had lost their two home games. After this they had come to Philadelphia and had won the third. They had the fourth game in hand by the crushing margin of eight to nothing when the seventh inning came along. Here was an eight-run lead, with an able pitcher in there holding the enemy helpless.

A Tragic Hack

This victory would have given the Cubs a great chance to clean up the show. Then, with men on bases, on two occasions fly balls suddenly sailed out in Hack Wilson's direction. These fly balls traveled in the direct path of the sun. They disappeared into the flame, against the background of a blinding blue sky. Wilson never had a chance to catch either, under the conditions, although one of them almost hit him on the head. They cost the ball game and the big chance to win the series.

Packed stands saw the tragedy of Hack Wilson. Millions heard about it over the radio. Other millions read about it in the papers. Hack had stood beneath a blazing spotlight that burned into his soul. When he left the ball park the "tragedy of ages" was in his face, and on his neck the burdens of the world," to quote Mr. Markham a trifle incorrectly.

All the cheers that had rung for him from April to October were less than nothing now. He was a broken being, paying the price the spotlight so often demands upon a second's notice.

There was the case of Al Espinosa in the open golf championship at Winged Foot. On the seventeenth green

of the final round, a hard par four, Espinosa sunk his putt for a brilliant three. This putt gave him his chance to tie Bobby Jones and force a play-off the next day.

At the moment it brought him a great thrill. A few hours later he would have given more than a trifle to have missed the putt and taken a four. For in that case he would have been remembered as the professional who came from behind with a rush and almost overtook the star amateur who had been ruling the realm of golf for many years.

He would have had nothing but praise for such a finish. As it was, he came to the play-off badly overgolfed, far below his top form, to take one of the worst beatings a good golfer ever endured. As Jones raced away, stroke after stroke, opening a murderous gap, it was easy enough to see the suffering that Espinosa carried from hole to hole. To be beaten was one thing. To be completely slaughtered before a big gallery was something else. There is no way to check a slump of this sort when it breaks out under fire.

Football, however, brings on more mental anguish than any other sport. In the first place, it is played by youngsters who only get the experience of a few big games. In the second place, these young players move into action with their souls on fire. They play with a keenness that has no parallel in competition. Many of them have been broken for years through some mistake that cost a big game.

It is all very well to say that after all "it is only a game." You can't make some young football player swallow that philosophy when 70,000 have seen his error that lost the battle, and millions have read about it.

Take the case of Tommy Longnecker of Dartmouth this last fall. Yale had taken a ten-to-nothing lead over Dartmouth, partly through some bad Green generalship with which Longnecker had nothing whatsoever to do. He had not even been in the game at the time these erring Hanover tactics were giving Eli the jump. Then the mighty Marsters hit his stride, Dartmouth switched its strategy to a passing game that opened up the Blue defense, and within five or six minutes Dartmouth was out in front, twelve to ten.

Marsters was hurt a short while later and Longnecker took his place. The young substitute was driving his team along nicely, on down into Yale territory with only five minutes left, when Fate fell across his neck. On fourth down the safe play would have been to kick out of bounds as close as possible to Yale's goal, forcing the Blue to make an eighty- or eighty-five-yard march to score.

The forward pass he called for was not as bad tactics as many have considered it. His idea was to shoot a pass directly over the line and even if this pass were intercepted no Blue back could return it many yards. But, just before the moment of passing, his right foot slipped on the wet sod. He was completely off balance and before he had time to think, he had thrown a wide pass to Ellis, the fastest sprinter on the field, in the stands or in the city of New Haven.

The accidental slipping of a foot led to the tragedy, but as it happened it blew up the game, and the elation of the whole victorious Yale team was not as intense as the soul agony which the Dartmouth player endured. Granting that it was a trifle risky, he might have called this same play twenty times, and, from a firmer footing, no such disaster would have followed.

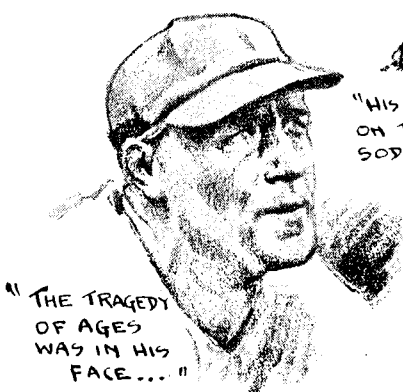
When Strong Men Weep

One can name more than a few football players as "so-and-so who lost this game or that game"—possibly by a fumble, possibly by something else. The public at large could get a much better picture of the whole show if it could crowd into the dressing-room of a beaten football team after some hard game, especially if the beaten team had lost by some single play. The number of heart-wounded athletes, either weeping or completely disconsolate, would be surprising.

Such things, of course, are all out of proportion. But that doesn't alter the raw fact that every entry who has a chance to be a hero also has a chance to slip or break at some big moment and suddenly discover that the sky has dropped upon his spine and that some twenty millions of his fellow countrymen, through information from the papers or over the radio, are naming him among the bonehead immortals.



"HIS FOOT SLIPPED ON THE WET SOD..."



"THE TRAGEDY OF AGES WAS IN HIS FACE..."

The Age of Youth

By Arthur
Somers Roche

The Story Thus Far:

DESPERATE because of her failure to make a decent living on the New York stage, Donna Raynor writes to Randolph Granby, a wealthy bachelor, whom she has never met. She explains her predicament, and ends her letter thus: "I could get a rich husband if I had a proper setting. It would cost a thousand a month and I'd need two years to get the proper man. Will you give it to me?"

Granby finally agrees to give her the money.

Donna opens her campaign by sub-leasing the apartment of Libby Prentiss, a wealthy society girl who is leaving for Europe. Hardly is she settled when adventure claims her. A handsome young man, decidedly the worse for drink, pushes past Jennie, the maid, calling loudly for Libby Prentiss. Donna orders him to leave. Then—"Believe I'll marry you," says the young visitor. "How would you like to be Mrs. Frank Gardner?" And Frank Gardner is the most sought-after bachelor in America!

Finally Donna succeeds in making Gardner leave. Next morning he sends orchids. Donna refuses to speak to him. The orchids, however, continue to arrive each day.

Donna arranges to take singing lessons from Mme. Galere, the list of whose pupils includes most of the Junior League. In a few weeks she is in the midst of the social swim. Granby and Gardner are both attentive. She has a devoted admirer in Don Blaisdell. Mrs. Fred Fairleigh has accepted her socially. Had she ever been silly enough to doubt that she would succeed?

Then the bubble bursts. At Mme. Galere's one morning she picks up the paper: in the gossip column there is an unmistakable reference to her—with the insinuation that she is beyond the pale.

VI

SHE conquered the impulse to run wildly from the building. She felt that mean shame which comes when one has been spattered by the filth of a passing vehicle. She was queerly reminded of an incident of her childhood. In her Sunday best, on the way to church, she had walked cautiously around a puddle on the sidewalk, a miniature pond that overflowed into the street. And a motor car, packed with Sunday golfers, had splashed through the water and sprayed her with oozy mud. At her cry of anguish the car had slowed down, and until she died she would not forget the laughter that came from the car's occupants.

Cruel, cruel, she had exclaimed to herself then, and cruel, cruel, she was saying to herself now. She remembered her agony of humiliation as she had fled home; even in the sympathy of her family she found shame. For there is as much shame, strangely, in things which have been done to us as in things which we have done ourselves.

As carelessly—and much more maliciously—as those motorists years ago had soiled her, so this columnist shamed her now. But, even in her panicky horror, she realized that this newspaper attack upon her was not entirely without cause. Years ago she had been a spick-and-span little girl in her Sabbath

finery, but the finery had been honestly come by. Today, not so little, in finery not so honestly achieved. . . . But what business was it of this newspaper Peeping Tom to cry aloud his suspicions?

But why bother about his reasons or his right to print what he had printed? It was done; it could not be recalled. The question to ask herself now was: would she be recognized as the heroine of the spiteful paragraph?

Well, Ran Granby would recognize her, of course. Equally of course, his suspicions already aroused, Frank Gardner would. She sighed. No use blinking her eyes to facts. Sue Philemon and all Sue's friends. . . . Why, everyone whom she had met knew that she had taken Libby Prentiss' apartment. All of them would naturally think that she was the girl meant by Mr. Manhattan.

WELL, what would they do? Would they—cut her? If she were one of them, who all her life had known them, she would not have to ask herself this second question. Of course they wouldn't. People did not desert their friends at a mere unsubstantiated rumor. But people *did* abandon new acquaintances of whom nasty things were said, unless immediate evidence were forthcoming to disprove the nastiness.

What a house of cards she had erected! At the first ill wind she found it trembling, tottering. . . . Imagine telling to anyone of these new acquaintances her real story! Tired of poverty, she had written to an absolute stranger, a wealthy bachelor, and asked him to give her sufficient money to enable her to frequent the class of society which, presumably, supplied the most desirable husbands. So far, her tale would be believable, would be listened to with cynicism. But the rest of it: the wealthy bachelor who, having seized one kiss, contented himself with that, asked for no more, humbly apologized for having taken that, left her, didn't attempt to see her. . . . Oh, no, the story was too incredible. Or, if it were believed, if her technical preservation of virtue were credited, she would nevertheless be looked upon as an adventuress.

Well, when you came right down to it, what else was she? This third question appalled her. Why did her mind recognize its right to be asked, and phrase it over the protest of her heart? She wasn't, she wasn't, she wasn't!

But denial availed nothing. She *was* an adventuress. But adventuresses were wicked, and wherein was she wicked? She had violated a canon of the social code, perhaps, but what of

it? Everyone, secretly or openly, committed breaches of the code. It was in being found out that the sin lay, or in not being powerful enough to laugh at censure if the thing were done openly.

Sudden understanding, however, was given to her. Her violation of the code would find its greatest resentment not in the fact that she had taken money from a man but in the fact that she had aspired to heights for whose rarefied air she was not qualified. All groups resent intruders, and that fashionable group she had entered, more than less important groups. There is something reassuring to most groups in the expulsion of one of their members. It enables one to express the thought: "We are better because we ignore him." Righteousness is aroused by the discovery of an intruder, and righteousness is the most flamingly cruel emotion known to the human race.

SHE could be of this Philemon-Granby-Gardner-Fairleigh set, and commit almost any sin, provided she avoided newspaper notoriety. But merely to be *in* meant that she must behave most circumspectly.

Singing ceased in the studio, and she heard murmured words that indicated that Mme. Galere's pupil was about to take her departure. Donna put the paper back on the table where she had found it. She glanced in the mirror of her compact, and found that recent emotion had committed no ravages upon her make-up. She flattered herself that her response to the coach's greeting was as casual as it should have been.

But, as she placed her fur on a chair, she saw a copy of the morning paper, opened at the same page that had engrossed her while she waited in the anteroom. Despite herself, she colored. And she knew, before she turned to meet Mme. Galere's eyes, that her



Illustrated by
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As they rose to dance, a man stopped beside them. It was Frank Gardner. "Why, it's old Ran Granby," he exclaimed. "Ran Granby and the li'l girl!"