

BOWLING'S TALKING MACHINE **BY BILL FAY**

ANDY VARIPAPA discovered that he was the world's greatest bowler during a match game with Joe Falcara in New York in 1930. Surprisingly, the knowledge made Andy unhappy.

"Falcara and I rolled against Jim Murgie and Charley Riley, a couple of the Philadelphia boys, at Fifty-third and Broadway," Andy recalls. "Nobody knows Varipapa then because I am just a Saturday-night bowler—an unknown toolmaker from Brooklyn. But I threw three straight 279 games and averaged 260 for the match. All of a sudden everybody knows Varipapa, and I get offers for exhibitions from all over the country. It was very sad."

The sad part was that Andy spoke broken Brooklynese—adequate for toolmaking, but scarcely understandable in Philadelphia and other cities even farther west which were clamoring for his bowling services. Andy had been busy working and bowling since his arrival from Calabria, Italy, in 1903, at the age of nine. He had wasted no time on syntax and pronunciation.

"I had no diction. I knew the words but I couldn't say them and you got to be able to lecture to make money in

exhibitions. You got to give the fans a show. So I started to learn diction and now—18 years later—Varipapa is called The Talking Machine."

The Talking Machine learned diction—as it has learned everything else—by hard work. Andy bought a secondhand car in 1934 and embarked on a series of winter exhibitions in the small Middle Western towns around Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis. In most of the small towns, the bowling alleys were close to the movie house, and Varipapa saw at least one picture in each town.

Learning Diction from Movies

"Westerns, comedies, love stories, I saw them all. I didn't care about the stories—I wanted to hear the words. Then I practiced the words as I drove to the next town. Maybe I'd drive 200 miles talking all the way—five or six hours straight. As a result, I now speak with perfect diction—like a Hollywood actor."

That is an understatement. The Talking Machine really speaks like a number of Hollywood actors. When it mentions "my old partner, Falcara," the "podner" has a drawled quality somewhere in between Hopalong Cas-

sidy and Gene Autry. When it mentions "baby" (Andy's attractive daughter), baby comes out clipped Clark Gable. This transition from broken Brooklynese to pure Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer did not occur overnight. Andy covered the Middle Western circuit for 10 years on a September-through-May schedule, bowling, driving and talking 18 hours per day.

Varipapa is a smart bowler and he learned plenty on back-country alleys. The extent of Andy's knowledge has become uncomfortably evident to his tournaments rivals who—as late as 1940—looked down upon The Talking Machine as an itinerant trick-shot artist. Andy won the All Star Individual Match Game championship for the second straight year last December. It was the first time any bowler retained the All Star title.

Andy also holds the National Doubles crown with Lou Campi, but he is prouder of his 204.65 average for 90 games in the last ten American Bowling Congress tournaments—the highest mark among contemporary keggers. However, Andy never has won the A.B.C., and he probably never will.

"The A.B.C. is a short nine-game tournament. The fellow who has the hottest streak and the most luck wins. In short matches, any good bowler can win. But in long matches—held under neutral, standardized conditions—Varipapa will win. I have the endurance, the knowledge and the skill."

The subject of neutral, standardized conditions is a touchy one with Varipapa. Andy's amazing trick shots have been exploited thoroughly in movie shorts. Consequently, when Andy shoots a low score—he rolled an inglorious 130 in Peoria several years ago—skeptical spectators make derisive noises through pursed lips.

"Such people do not understand how conditions affect scores. Champion bowlers cannot score consistently on old alleys. An alley is like a lawn. You wear paths in it from constant use—what we call 'scorching'—and the paths keep the ball from rolling true. Some alleys are oiled too much and the ball won't hook. Other alleys are too dry and the ball hooks too much. That's why scores and averages never mean a thing to me until I see the bowler and his alley. Some bowlers average 50 points higher at home because their deliveries fit the grooves of their favorite alleys."

Varipapa insists that a 40-game match under neutral conditions is the minimum test of bowling skill. His definition of neutral conditions includes new or well-conditioned alleys and new 3-pound 6-ounce pins. Regulation pins vary in weight from 3 pounds 3 ounces to 3 pounds 8 ounces, and bowling-alley operators often make use of this five-ounce differential to send scores up—or down.

"Old light pins fall easily. I know because I see my ball hit every pin—Varipapa has good eyes even though he is fifty-four years old. But new heavy pins are hard to knock down. You have to hit the one-three strike pocket on the nose—and Varipapa hits it 95 per cent of the time on a true alley. You have to throw a fast hook to knock down new 3-pound 6-ounce



pins, but I like that—Varipapa has the arm!"

No doubt about it. Varipapa has the arm. When we visited The Talking Machine, Andy was playing catch with a 16-pound bowling ball in his hotel room. He was swinging the ball forward with his right arm as though shooting for the head pin. Then, at the moment of release, his wrist flipped the ball up and over his head. There was no effort in the motion.

"This is how I develop my hook. Watch the spin. Nobody spins the ball like Varipapa. This callus on the thumb—it comes from spinning the ball. You want a good note? Take this down. Varipapa spins the ball so fast his thumb swells up and wears out the thumb hole in his ball. Varipapa cannot use a ball longer than forty games."

A Brooklyn Success Story

The Talking Machine's earliest ambition was to become a major-league baseball player. Andy started to bowl after both legs were broken in a boyhood accident (his bicycle crashed into a brewery wagon). Andy worked as a streetcar switchman on Brooklyn Bridge for \$9 a week before graduating to toolmaking. He's proud of his family in Hempstead, New York, his 14-alley Hempstead Recreation Center and his bowling record. He says his wife, Alice, is the world's best cook ("You can prove it by looking at the Varipapas").

The Varipapas have three children, Connie, Lorraine and Frank. Connie is married and has a son ("which makes Varipapa the only grandfather champion in sports"). Lorraine is an excellent bowler and has appeared in several bowling movies. Frank, twenty-eight years old and a graduate of Lehigh, will compete in the A.B.C. tournament this year.

Critics have called Varipapa arrogant because he refuses to quarrel with statistics that prove he is the finest bowler extant. It would be more accurate to say that Andy is candid rather than conceited. He's also pleasant, co-operative and popular with the other bowlers. He has no illusions about being invincible.

"They tell me I ought to retire now that I have won the All Star twice in a row. They say I ought to retire undefeated. What does that mean? That you can't be beaten? No! It means that you quit before somebody beat you. Varipapa will keep on bowling."

On the way to the door, Andy presented his card:

ANDY VARIPAPA
Hempstead Recreation Center
"Home of the World's Most Sensational Bowler"

"I had to put something on it," Andy explained, "and I thought I might as well tell the truth."

● Most ominous quote of the year: I am going to be my own natural self—Leo Durocher. ★★★

Andy Varipapa modestly calls himself the world's most sensational bowler. And his tournament record over the years will bear him out

COLLIER'S

SPORTS



PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY HY PESKIN

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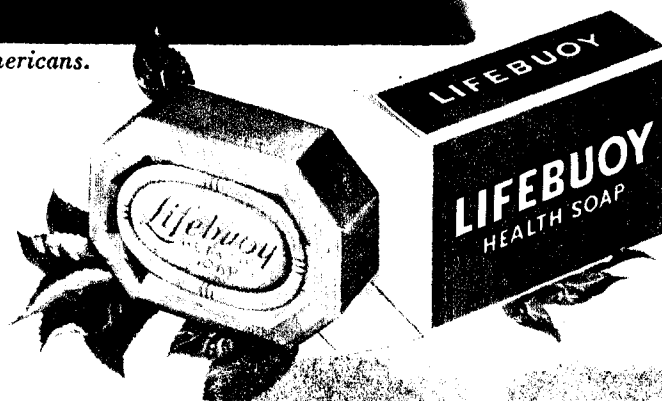
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KEEP UP WITH THE WORLD

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Authorities proved long ago there is no truth in the story that the bad men of the Old West cut a notch in their revolver handles every time they killed a person. Yet this tale is as prevalent today as it was 75 years ago and many Western curio shops still sell guns, liberally notched, that are reputed to have belonged originally to certain notorious outlaws.

America's worst excursion boat disaster was the burning of the S.S. General Slocum in New York's East River on the morning of June 15, 1904. Although its fire hose and life preservers were too rotted to be used and the fire was well under way when discovered, the captain decided to beach the vessel on an island 20 minutes away instead of on the near-by mud banks. This strange decision brought about the death of 1,021 of the 1,358 passengers, mostly women and children, who were on their annual outing. Later this Captain W. H. Van Schaick was tried for manslaughter, convicted and given a sentence of ten years, eight of which he served before receiving a pardon.

Bridge Birch, a Holstein-Friesian cow owned by the Moortown Farm in Hampshire, England, now holds the world's milk-producing record. For almost a year, her average yield has been 59.3 quarts a day, which is 4.3 quarts more than that produced by the previous record holder, an American animal of the same breed, and 53.2 quarts more than the daily average for all U.S. cows.

At the celebration "Days of '76" held every August in Deadwood, South Dakota, several of the town's historical events are always re-enacted, the most famous and dramatic being the murder of Wild Bill Hickok and the capture, trial and hanging of his killer, Jack McCall.

Safe-deposit companies in this country spend nearly \$1,000,000 a year in employing outside specialists to break open about 65,000 safe-deposit boxes whose holders either lose their keys or fail to pay their rent for two years.

Since 1793, United States mints have issued for general circulation 108 coins of different designs, ranging from copper half cents to \$20 gold pieces. Of this number, which excludes commemorative coins, only five have ever borne the portrait of a celebrated person. With date of first minting, they are: the Lincoln penny—1909; Washington quarter—1932; Jefferson nickel—1938; Roosevelt dime—1946; and the Benjamin Franklin half dollar—1948.

A new machine that cuts out metal parts, ranging in size from ash trays to locomotive driving rods, is able "to read and follow a blueprint." An electronic eye in a small arm traces the outlines of the blueprint, and the movements are reproduced, on a pre-determined scale, by a large arm wielding the cutting torch.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers collects a license fee today from all places in which its copyrighted music is played for profit, either by live musicians or from recordings on film or wax. Totalling 48,000, these places comprise 1,800 radio stations; 7,200 hotels, restaurants, dance halls and night clubs; 12,000 bars, taverns and cocktail lounges; 16,000 movie houses; and 11,000 miscellaneous establishments, including those which are served by wired-music firms.

Although "Welsh rarebit" is spelled this way in most cookbooks and on the majority of restaurant menus and labels of food manufacturers in the United States, the correct spelling of this dish, as well as the pronunciation, is "Welsh rabbit."

A recent official study of American women who are or have been married and are past their reproductive period shows that 14 in every 100 never gave birth to a child.

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