

## HANDBALL IS FOOTWORK

BY BILL FAY



**G**US LEWIS has worked at so many odd jobs that nobody can understand how he found time to learn the championship geometry of four-wall handball.

Thirteen-year-old Gus shuffled off from Buffalo in 1932 and was a hooper on the Schine vaudeville circuit for five years. He didn't kill vaudeville, but he may have been an accessory after the fact.

Then Gus shuffled home to Buffalo to work as a painter—at \$1,000 a month. Rather high wages for a painter but Gus was a rather high painter. He air-gunned the flagpole on Buffalo City Hall—32 stories up—and daubed bridgework over Niagara gorge in hundreds of feet of air.

When the bridgework and flagpole market slumped, Gus descended to painting the insides of electric furnaces at \$10 an hour. It was hot and exciting work because he was only a few brush strokes away from live 27,000-volt electrodes. "They figured it was

cheaper to pay us ten bucks an hour than to turn off the furnaces," Gus recalls. "Sometimes gas pockets popped up through the hot soup and there'd be all kinds of hell. Once, I had my mustache, eyebrows and hair singed off."

That once was enough. Gus decided there was a brighter and longer future in demonstrating department-store aluminum cooking utensils. Twice daily, he prepared a full-course dinner for 15 customers. Gus (smiling, black-haired and a bit of a devil with the women shoppers) was Buffalo's foremost aluminum demonstrator when the Seabees sent him off into the wild blue yonder—painting 250-foot radio towers in Bermuda and Africa. Gus developed a mahogany complexion and a liking for sunshine which carried him west to California in 1945. He sold pari-mutuel tickets at Santa Anita, then slipped into the sound-technician department at RKO.

Every afternoon Gus played hand-

ball at the Walt Disney studios with Joe Platak, winner of nine national championships. Platak sharpened Gus' left-hand kill, and Gus won the National A.A.U. four-wall title.

Footwork explains Gus' success. He's never off balance—a precaution he learned over Niagara gorge. "You really play handball with your feet," Gus says. "I never watch my opponent's hands when we warm up—I watch his feet. They tell me how he'll hit—where his weakness is."

However, when play starts, Gus watches hand action on every shot. "Most good players hit a 'break' ball—that is, they cut it so that it bounces left or right when it hits. You have to watch their wrists to predict the bounce action—and you've got to have a good memory. Suppose a ball bounces funny. Automatically, my memory goes back and remembers the hand action that produced the freak hop. Maybe a game or two will go by before my opponent tries the shot

again, but the instant I see that peculiar hand action I'm ready. I anticipate the bounce. A good handball player never forgets a wrist."

After Gus retained his national title in April, RKO offered its steeple-jack-of-all-trades an acting role—as a flagpole sitter. Gus said no, thanks. The champion who has spent most of his life up in the air finally has settled down.

### STRICTLY SECOND DIVISION

No wonder American League officials are worried. Competitively, the league is falling apart. The disparity between the powerful Yanks and Red Sox and the "dog-meat" clubs in Chicago, St. Louis and Washington is so great that 1948 may well produce the most one-sided race in American League history.

Usually, the situation is even worse in Philadelphia, where Connie Mack's bargain-basement entries have finished eighth nine times in the 13 years since 1935.

Although the American League probably will continue to win more than its share of World Series and All-Star games—thanks to robust support from New York and Boston—the National League enjoys much better competitive and financial health. It has seven owners who are more interested in pennants than profits, and that eighth wonder of the baseball world, Branch Rickey, who divides his interest between developing pennant players for Brooklyn and selling antiques to the Pittsburgh Pirates for \$75,000 apiece.

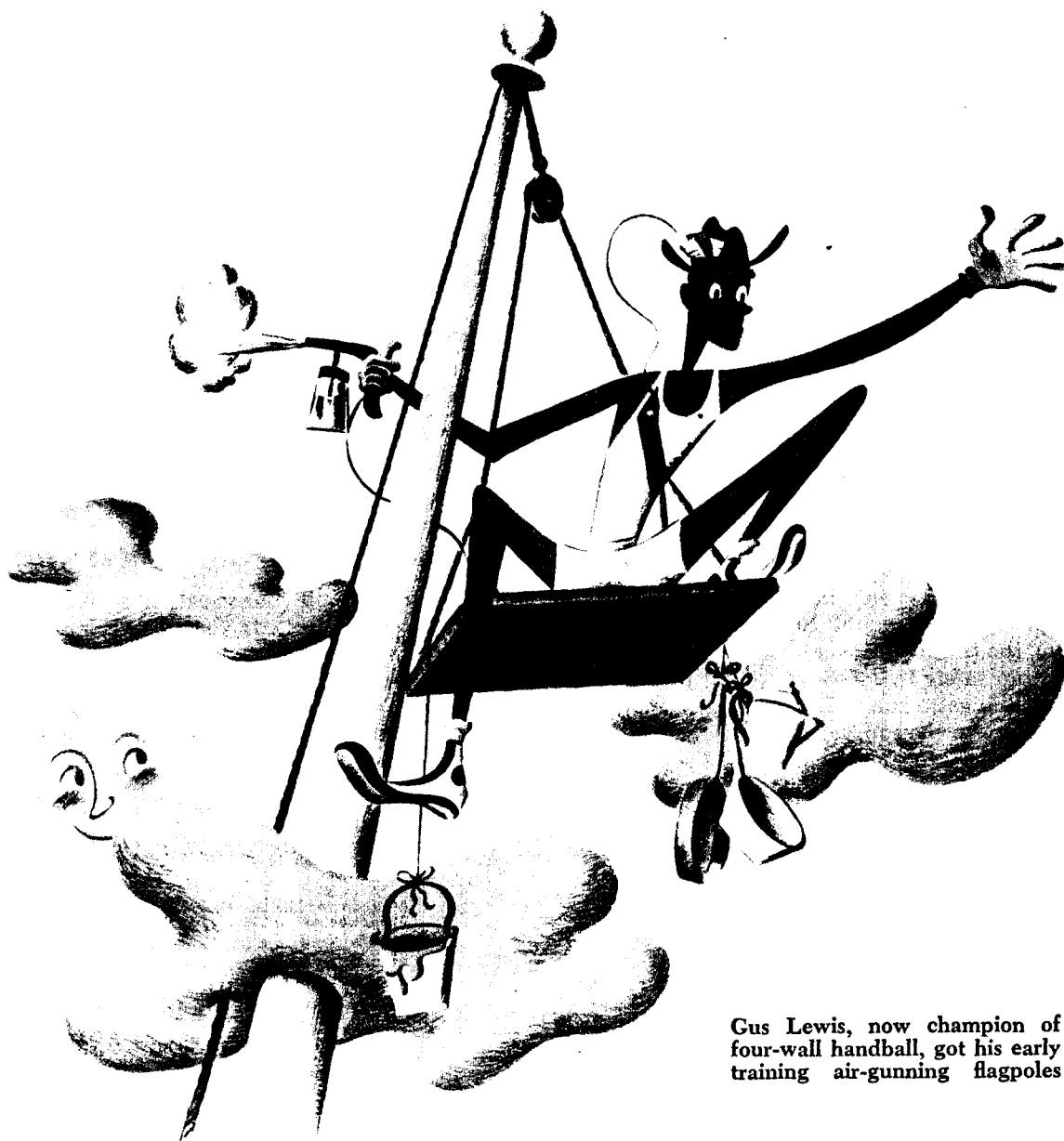
Somewhere, the American League must find progressive leaders for its decadent second division. Connie Mack and Clark Griffith are young men no longer. In St. Louis, the DeWitts are an unknown baseball quantity. Chicago's last hope is Charles Comiskey II, grandson of the late Charley (Old Roman) Comiskey, shrewd and able founder of the White Sox.

Young Charley is secretary and president-elect, but his mother, Grace, determines financial policy which can be summed up in five words: Never waste money on players. Occasionally, young Charley issues optimistic estimates of future Sox varsities. Recently, he was irked by his slothful athletes in spring training and predicted darkly that changes would be made. Nothing happened, though, except that Coach Red Faber knocked over the dugout water cooler two weeks later. Conscientious Chicago baseball writers reported in straight news fashion that the crash startled Red and woke up everybody on the Sox bench.

### RIDING THE SMOG

Glider pilots are worried about the Los Angeles smog problem. They're afraid some smart chamber of commerce operator will find a way to eliminate the thick, black stuff which makes the country around Mirage

(Continued on page 94)



Gus Lewis, now champion of four-wall handball, got his early training air-gunning flagpoles

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE HARRINGTON

# news about nylon



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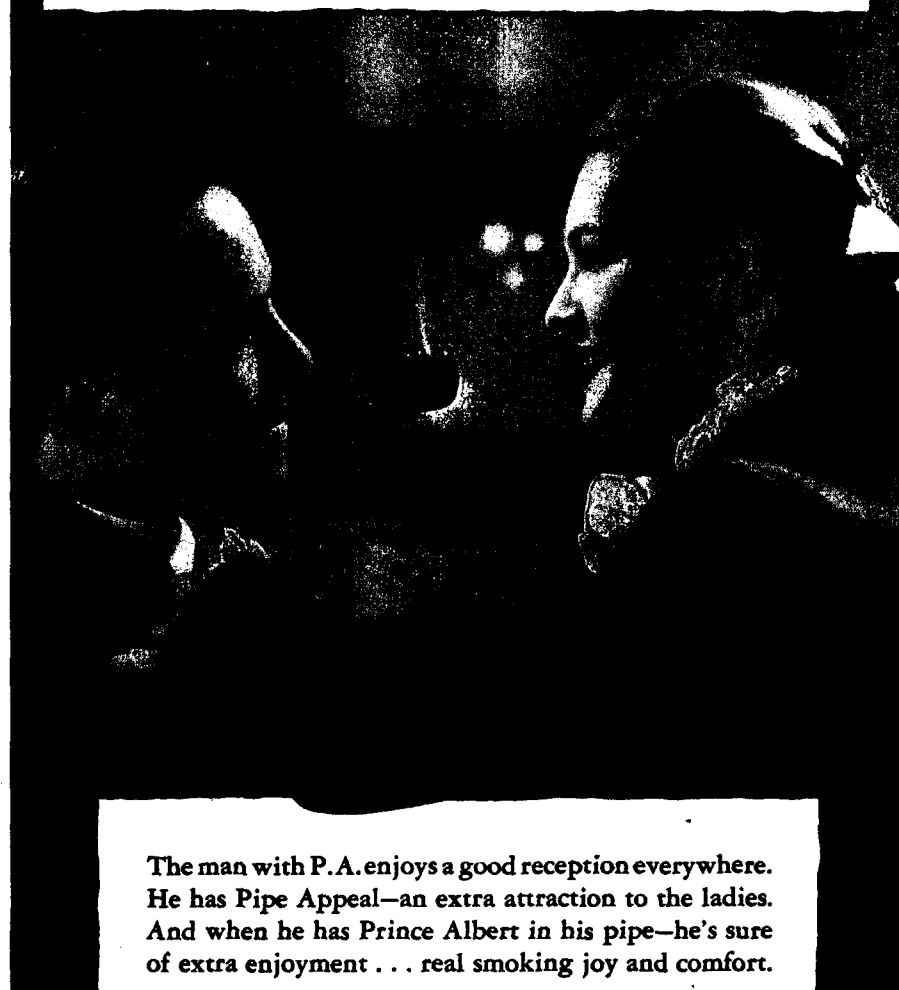
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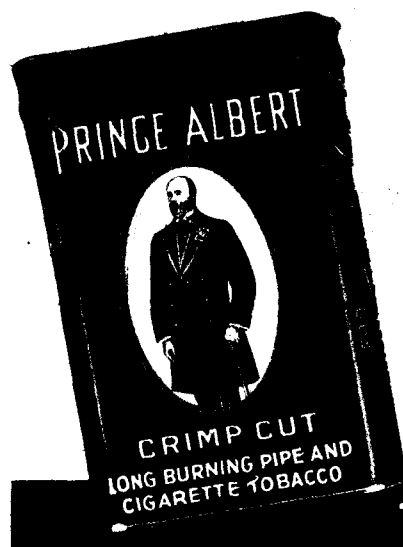
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GEORGE DE ZAVAS

## KEEP UP WITH THE WORLD

BY FRELING FOSTER

In 18th-century Europe, a prized possession of wealthy families was a snuffbox, usually of gold and studded with gems, that not only played music, but also had a scene on its cover in which characters performed mechanically. In one such scene on a box preserved today in a famous collection, six firemen pump water on a burning house while three persons trapped in its flaming rooms dash from window to window seeking to be rescued.

The largest sum of money ever won on a horse race was that paid to Arnold Rothstein, the New York gambler, at the Aqueduct Track on July 4, 1921. The horse, Sidereal, was unknown and ignored in the betting, but Rothstein was sure the colt would win as it had been trained by a friend and held for just such a race. To avoid changing the 30-to-1 odds, Rothstein waited until shortly before post time and then quickly placed huge bets with a number of bookies—and a few minutes later collected approximately \$800,000.

A quick glance may not be sufficient to determine whether a person is intoxicated as the appearance of drunkenness can result from over 50 other causes, including vertigo, epilepsy, narcolepsy, brain tumor, fractured skull and toxemic coma of diabetes.

Of the 8,000 millionaires in the U.S. today, 4,475 or 56 per cent live in six states—California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

In the United States, the books of 20 matches presented to purchasers of cigars and cigarettes are not, as commonly supposed, given free to the retailers by the companies whose ads appear on the covers. Cigar stores and stands have to buy them, at the rate of four books for a cent, and the number they hand out gratis costs them \$450,000 a week.

Owing to persecutions in 16th century England, thousands of wanted men and women hid in secretly built rooms in the homes of friends, and their concealment was rarely made known to other members of the households. Although the hiding persons dared not move about or light a candle until midnight, they were occasionally seen through the windows by neighbors or heard on secret staircases by servants. These experiences so thoroughly convinced the people of the existence of ghosts that today some 150 luxurious country houses in Britain cannot be rented because of rumored visitations of phantoms.

More than 100 large American restaurants now cook on electronic ranges, which are not sold but rented at \$150 a month. This new kind of range is valued for its speed in busy kitchens, as it will, for example, flash-sear and cook a ten-ounce steak in 45 seconds.

While on a visit to Melbourne, Australia, in 1918, Alexander Wickham, a native of the Solomon Islands and a champion swimmer, accepted a 5-to-1 bet, offered by a group of sportsmen, that he did not have the courage to dive from a certain high cliff. Although Wickham feared it would kill him, he made and survived the dive, the highest on record, which was 206 feet, or the height of a seventeen-story building.

Bullfighting is believed to be the only spectator sport on which there is no betting, because the bull is almost always killed. Should it leave the arena alive, it is either saved for breeding purposes or else it is shot, as the experience in the ring makes the animal too dangerous for a matador to fight it again.

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