

They're BALMY OVER



The Bradley varsity huddles around Coach Forddy Anderson (l. to r.): Gene (Squeaky) Melchiorre, Bill Mann, Elmer Behnke, Aaron Preece,

Fred Schlichtman and Charles Grover. Anderson's basic strategy is simple—run fast, break fast, shoot fast and try to outscore the opposition

All Peoria follows the Braves. Bank president Fred Blossom (center) and businessman Ben Koch, chief Bradley Booster, join kids in stands

"Indian Chief" Jack Wright, a student at Bradley, and eight-year-old mascot David Suffield make powerful pregame medicine for the Braves



BASKETBALL

You can forget those old vaudeville gags about how boring life can be in Peoria. There hasn't been a dull moment in the town since the Bradley University Braves became a major hoop power

THE Bradley University basketball team of Peoria, Illinois, received a polite eviction notice from the United States government in the spring of 1948. Due to a greatly expanded National Guard training program (the government explained) Peoria armory could not be made available for Bradley athletic events after June 1st. Sorry.

The eviction posed the problem of raising money for a new field house in a hurry. Bradley officials finally decided upon a sale of five-year season tickets. It was announced that for \$125, payable in advance, a patron could reserve a bleacher seat for all Bradley home games from 1949 through 1953. For \$175 a comfort-loving patron could reserve a deluxe, padded theater-type chair in the center of the proposed auditorium (capacity: 8,300).

The public response was slightly overwhelming. Within two weeks, \$327,000 poured into the Bradley ticket office. Patrons who loved basketball, but who were short on cash, made their purchases on easy credit terms arranged by Fred Blossom, president of the Central National Bank. The Blossom plan—quickly adopted by all Peoria banks—provided for 5 per cent interest and 21 months to pay. An estimated \$60,000 worth of tickets was underwritten without a murmur of protest from federal banking examiners. Around Peoria, a Bradley basketball ticket is considered as sound an investment as government bonds.

Every Bradley game since 1946 has been a sell-out. Thanks to the field-house financing plan, this happy condition will prevail at least until 1954 when, it is anticipated, all current ticket holders then alive will exercise their renewal options for another five years.

Even when a five-year ticket holder dies prematurely, there is little likelihood of his ducat being returned to the university for resale. Last August an elderly manufacturer passed away, leaving an estate estimated at \$500,000 and two theater-type chairs in the fifth row, center. Within two hours after his obituary appeared in the Peoria Star, Mrs. Margaret Moore, the Bradley ticket manager, received 38 telephone queries from applicants eager to assume the deceased's basketball obligations.

But the calls were in vain. The manufacturer's will directed the university to transfer ownership of the tickets to his eldest son.

There are two reasons why Peoria (pop. 111,500) runs a high civic temperature over Bradley's basketball Braves.

First reason: The Braves have been going out of their way since 1938 to meet and beat the best college teams extant. Over 12 years, they've compiled a .767 winning percentage. Last year, they flew 20,000 miles in a whirlwind campaign which netted 27 victories against three defeats during the regular season, and they were voted the nation's No. 1 team in the Associated Press poll.

Second reason: Bradley's continued success has been achieved strictly with home-grown talent. The Braves live either in Peoria or within a short bus ride of Peoria. Since 1938, only one varsity starter has originated outside of Illinois. That was Les Getz of Goshen, Indiana, who wandered onto the campus for no other reason than that his uncle had once attended Bradley. Les didn't even have a scholarship. Honest.

Generations of vaudeville and radio comedians have created the impression that Peoria is a somnolent small town where nothing ever happens. This idea was summed up in mournful fashion by a feminine character in the Broadway stage success *Lightnin'*, who complained that the only reason she and her husband got married was that they were stranded in Peoria and it rained all week.

The Night of March Eighteenth

But things do happen in Peoria. Almost unbelievable things. Especially during basketball season. From December through March, Peoria simply goes basketball crazy. Some of the following events may seem incredible to non-Peoria residents, but they all happened last March 18th, when the Braves were battling City College of New York in the final round of the National Invitation Tournament.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Peoria radio stations WIRL and WMBD opened up with a barrage of spot announcements urging listeners to stand by for play-by-play broadcasts direct

from Madison Square Garden in New York City.

At six o'clock, U.S. Highway 66 was bulging with an estimated extra load of 2,000 cars—Peorians headed northward for a barside N.I.T. seat in the television-equipped pubs of Chicago, 150 miles away.

At 7:15, workmen wheeled scoreboards onto the stages of Peoria's two first-run movie houses, the Madison (Joan Caulfield in *Dear Wife*) and the Palace (Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*). During the late shows, while Joan and Jane emoted, the scoreboards flashed up-to-the-second bulletins hot off the radio from New York.

At 9:10, when Bradley jumped off against City College, a squad of messenger boys—shouting the latest radio bulletins—began to patrol the noisy assembly lines in the Caterpillar Tractor plant on West Washington Street.

At 9:55, a newspaper reporter assigned to a stay-at-home human-interest story returned to his office with the information that the game broadcast was being enthusiastically received in such diverse locations as the Proctor Home for the Aged on North Glendale Avenue and a bordello on Jefferson Street.

At 10:15, an advertising agency completed an audience survey which estimated that 69 per cent of all homes equipped with radios in the Peoria trading area were tuned in on the play-by-play broadcasts. (A similar survey had set the peak audience for the 1948 Truman-Dewey Presidential election returns at 48 per cent.)

At 10:45, the game ended. Jack Quinn, WMBD's sports caster in New York, repeated the final score—City College, 69; Bradley, 61. Then Quinn broke down and cried right into his microphone.

At midnight, WIRL began to rebroadcast a transcribed play-by-play of the Bradley defeat for 20,000 workers coming off the second shift in Peoria's industrial plants.

At 2:00 A.M., the vanguard of the television caravan rolled back into town from Chicago.

The defeat by CCNY dampened community enthusiasm to such an extent that only 10,000 fans assembled at Peoria airport to welcome the Braves home from New York. (Continued on page 65)

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY JOHN MENDICINO AND ROCCO PADULO

"Sneaky" Melchiorre, Peoria's favorite son, grabs rebound and takes off in game with UCLA. Lanky Elmer Behnke (32) is right behind him



Team gets plenty of radio coverage. Melchiorre submits to quiz by Chick Hearn (WEEK), Hank Fisher (WIRL) and Jack Quinn (WMBD)



Revolt of the TRIFFIDS

By JOHN WYNHAM

This was terror, as only the helpless can know terror.
Bill and Josella were threatened by the plants that walked

The Story: From the moment I woke up in a hospital on the outskirts of London I knew something was dreadfully wrong, even apart from the bandages that were still on my eyes. But I didn't know until later that the world had come to an end: the only world I had ever known, anyway. A week before I'd been slashed across the eyes by a triffid, one of those curious walking plants that had taken root all over the earth after falling from the planet Venus. My name is BILL MASEN, and triffids were my business; I'd made a special study of the creatures, and when I left school I went to work for a giant food trust which raised triffids, whose extracts had valuable food and medicinal properties. On the triffid farm where I did research one of the triffids attacked me; my associate, a brilliant researcher named WALTER LUCKNOR, gave me suitable first aid and got me to the hospital.

Usually a triffid's sting will blind a man; but thanks to Walter and the immunity I had built up, my sight was saved. What happened to Walter on the horrible night when disaster from the planets struck the world I don't know—but I can guess. I took the bandages off my eyes and looked about me. Everyone I found in the hospital—patients, doctors and nurses—had been stricken blind. The night before, brilliant flashes across the sky had been breathlessly reported to me by a hospital nurse; and the radio had been raucous with bulletins describing violent disturbances in the skies.

In the London streets I found mobs of blinded people milling about in panic and disorder. I saw hardly anyone who still had sight; and I remembered with fear how Walter Lucknor had once told me that the only advantage a human being had over a triffid was sight.

All ordinary decency had been abandoned by the frightened people who had been blinded; and I soon learned that the blind sought to make captives of those who could still see, in order to force them to forage for food. In Piccadilly Circus I saw one sighted man leading a mob of blind rioters. And nearby I found a blind man brutally beating a girl whose hands were bound by cords to his wrists. I fought the blind man and released the almost hysterical girl.

II

I LOOKED at the weeping girl for a moment, and then I looked about us for someplace to go. A few yards away there was a pub crowded with sightless revelers; a phonograph brayed through its smashed windows; glasses crashed on the pavement outside, and inside everyone seemed to be having a high old time in a desperate kind of way. Just beyond it was a small pub, whose door and windows

seemed to be intact: the mobs had passed this one by.

I led the girl to this smaller pub, broke in the door of the saloon bar, and helped her in: she was still near hysteria, and I had almost to carry her to a chair. In some makeshift way I fixed the swinging doors so that they couldn't easily be opened. Then I went to the bar and fixed two drinks.

The girl sipped at hers, still sobbing a little, but more quietly now. I drank my own drink slowly, giving her time to get over it. I stole an occasional covert look at the girl. Her clothes—or the remnants of them—were of good quality. She was blond, and it seemed very likely that under the smudges and smears she was good-looking. Her height was three or four inches less than my own, her build slim and—I believe the word used to be—lithe. I guessed her age at about twenty-four; I also guessed that she had not, up to now, led a hard life. Her well-shaped hands were smooth and those fingernails still unbroken were of a length more decorative than practical.

The drink did gradual good work. By the end of it she was sufficiently recovered for habit of mind to assert itself.

"I must look awful," she remarked. She got up, and walked over to a mirror. "I certainly do," she said. "Where—?"

"You might try through there," I suggested.

It was twenty minutes or so before she came back. Considering the limited facilities there must have been, she had made a good job of it, and morale was much improved. She now looked like a film director's idea of the heroine after a rough-house rather than the genuine thing.

"Cigarette?" I asked as I handed her another drink.

Then, to pass the time and quiet our nerves, we drank and swapped stories. I told mine first. When it was her turn she said:

"I'm damned ashamed of myself. I'm not a bit like that really—like you found me. In fact, I'm reasonably self-reliant, though you mightn't think it. But somehow the whole thing suddenly got too big for me. It was the awful prospect more than what actually happened. I had got to thinking that I was the only person left in the whole world who could see. It got me down, and all at once I was frightened and silly, and I broke down and howled like a girl in a Victorian melodrama. I'd never, never have believed it of me."

"We'll probably be learning a lot about ourselves soon," I said. "Don't let it worry you."

"But it does worry me. If I can slip my gears like that—" She left the sentence unfinished.

"I was pretty near panic in that hospital," I said. "We're human beings, not calculating machines."

Her name was Josella Playton. There was something familiar about that, but I couldn't place it. Her home was in Dene Road, St. John's Wood. That fitted in more or less with my surmises. I remembered Dene Road: detached, comfortable houses, mostly ugly, but all expensive.

Her escape from the general affliction had been as much a matter of luck as mine. She had been at a party on the Monday night—a pretty considerable party, it seemed.

"I suppose somebody who thinks that kind of thing funny must have been fooling with the drinks. I've never felt so ill as I did at the end of it—and I really didn't have much," she said.

TUESDAY, it seemed, was a day of blurred miseries and a record hang-over. At about four in the afternoon she had had more than enough of it. She told the servants that come comets, earthquakes, or the day of judgment itself, she was not to be disturbed. Then she had taken a strong sleeping powder, which in the circumstance and on an empty stomach had worked with the efficiency of knockout drops.

From then on she had known nothing until the following morning when she was awakened by her father stumbling into her room.

"Josella," he was saying, "get Dr. Mayle. Tell him I've gone blind—stone-blind."

She had got up hurriedly, amazed to see that it was already past nine o'clock. The servants had answered neither her father's bell nor her own. She went to rouse them, and found to her horror that they, too, were blind.

With the telephone out of order, the only course seemed to be for her to take the car and fetch the doctor herself. The quiet streets and absence of traffic had seemed queer, but she had already driven a mile before she realized what had happened. She all but turned back in panic—but she forced herself to go on. There was the chance that the doctor might have escaped the malady, whatever it was.

Halfway down Regent Street the engine had started to miss and sputter; finally it stopped. In her hurried start she had not looked at the gauge, and had run the reserve tank dry.

She sat there for a (Continued on page 50)

ILLUSTRATED BY FRED BANBERY

The triffid stood in the middle of the room. Beside it the body of an elderly man was sprawled. Josella shook as I held her arm

