

SPORTS

ILLUSTRATED



MARCH 7, 1955
25 CENTS

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COVER: Badminton's Alston

Photograph by MARK KAUFFMAN

The game of badminton can be one of the mildest sports in the world, but not as played by such experts as Joseph Cameron Alston, the FBI agent who is the No. 1 player in the U.S. As Alston plays it, badminton is fast, furious and punishing. For details, including the speed of a shuttlecock, see SOUNDTRACK, page 22.

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IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

CASEY STENGEL STARTS ALL OVER AGAIN

The manager of the former world champions made the winter's biggest trading news. Now he is down in Florida assembling a new machine that may—or may not—run down the Indians. A progress report in words by AL WRIGHT and pictures by MARK KAUFFMAN

THE COLLEGE STAR THE PROS WANT MOST

He's a little fellow by modern basketball standards (only 6'2"), but around the country a lot of professional scouts whisper: "Buzzy Wilkinson," when asked to name their No. 1 pick for 1955-56 season. A word portrait of the University of Virginia team captain by BOOTON HERNDON

PLUS: A FOUR-PAGE GALLERY OF AMERICA'S TOP SKIERS—IN COLOR

is to tell them: there is another. Have you seen Arnold Sowell run?

Arnold Milton Sowell is a slender young man from Pittsburgh, who will not be 20 until April 6 but who has already been called by one astute track coach—George Eastment of Manhattan College—"the greatest runner I ever saw."

Eastment offered his verdict last week after the AAU 1,000-yard run, in which Sowell tied the world record of 2:08.2 and soundly defeated the great Norwegian runner Audun Boysen. But Eastment must have been thinking, too, of Sowell's hard-won victories over Fordham's remarkable half-miler Tom Courtney in the outdoor IC4A and NCAA championship half miles last spring, when the powerful Courtney was at the very peak of his form, of Sowell's ability to turn in cracking times at distances from 440 yards (46.9) to five miles (24:59), of the casual, almost absent-minded way he ran a 1:52.1 half mile in the NYAC indoor games three weeks ago, barely a second and a half off the indoor world record, of the fact that in dual meets Sowell has appeared in five different events for the University of Pittsburgh.

Or perhaps it is simply because Eastment has watched Sowell run, and like a dedicated track man choked at the perfection of Sowell's spring and stride, his drive and sprint.

Carl Olson, Pittsburgh's grizzled, unexcited track coach, smiles at Eastment's comment. After all, Eastment never had a runner like Sowell, while Olson once had Johnny Woodruff, the 6-foot 4-inch giant with the nine-foot stride who won the Olympic 800 meters in 1936 at Berlin as a college freshman (and who danced an odd little Chaplinlike burlesque of Adolph Hitler's stiff-armed Nazi salute when that race-baiting dictator, furious at the success of those he called America's "black auxiliaries," refused to greet the victorious Woodruff).

Olson has a tremendous regard and affection for Sowell, but when it comes to comparisons he stands firm and says, "At this stage in their careers, Woodruff was greater."

But Sowell's potential is staggering. At 19 he has years and years of competition ahead of him (Mal Whitfield, for example, is 30).

"And he coaches so well," Olson said last week just before the IC4A championships in New York. "After that NYAC half I said, 'Arnie, you need work.' He said, 'Okay, Coach.' I ran him a three-quarters on Monday. I said, 'Arnie, you have to do better.' I ran him another on Tuesday and he did 3:05. On our old dirt track that's equivalent to 2:58. I said, 'Arnie, that's all. Don't do another thing.' That Saturday, before the AAU 1,000,

I said to Dan Ferris, 'Dan, we're ready.'"

Olson sat back, as proud as a parent. "Well," he said, "you saw the meet."

Last Saturday, Sowell won the IC4A 1,000-yard title and anchored Pitt's championship mile-relay team. In the 1,000 he ran to save his strength for the relay and his time was a slow 2:14.7. But he ran with such awe-inspiring ease, as good runners struggled behind him, that there was simply no question in anyone's mind that Sowell was the outstanding athlete of the meet.

One veteran fan who has watched track and field since the turn of the century and whose basis of comparison comprises men like Sheppard, Meredith, Helffrich, Eastman, Hornbostel, Woodruff and Whitfield gave to Sowell his highest compliment.

"He's a real good runner," he said.

Apple pie for Norman

THE HUSKY little blonde turned her blue eyes on the two local reporters from the San Diego *Union* sitting in the living room of her mother's house. "I just don't enjoy tennis any more," she told them. "I've lost that old spark, the drive one must maintain to go through a long season's campaign like I have for several years. All the time I've been thinking of Norman and our plans together," she continued, looking over at Norman Brinker, the young Olympic equestrian she met two years ago. "So I said, 'Let's analyze it, Mo. There's no use going on like this. If I don't have the keen interest for tennis, a tour



would be no good.' So I said to myself, 'Might as well tie that hitch and get married.' We plan to do so in June."

Thus with a retirement announcement that Calvin Coolidge would have thought a bit verbose, Maureen Connolly passed the word that at the age of 20 she was going to stop accumulating the world's tennis titles that have been her own private preserve since she was 17. Hers is a fabulous record. When she first won at Forest Hills in 1951, Maureen was the youngest national champion since May Sutton turned the trick in 1904. In 1953, she became the first woman ever to sweep the four major championships—Australia, France, England and the U.S., the last without the loss of a set.

After winning her third straight Wimbledon title last June, Little Mo went home to San Diego, her horse, her boy friend and the accident that changed the shape of her life. While

she was riding down a road, her horse shied into a truck, breaking her leg just above the ankle and putting her out of last year's Nationals. But no one seriously doubted she would be back this year to dominate the women as only Suzanne Lenglen, Helen Wills and Alice Marble did before her.

In recent weeks, Little Mo has been working out on her mended leg, which now bears a deep scar. But her heart and mind seemed to be on other matters. "The big thing is that I've lost my interest," Mo explained to the reporters. "The leg, of course, is a factor. It's not a new limb, but I've been running and playing fairly well. It's bothered me to this extent: sometimes it hurts at night when I get through playing. Mainly, though, it's my mental attitude. I just want to retire for a while."

This was very bad news in several quarters. Amateur tennis officials, who like to see the crowds that jaunty Little Mo brings to their grandstands, moaned out loud. They pretended not to believe she was really serious. "She'll take a year off for her marriage and then we'll see her on the courts again, I'm sure," said one of them. Promoter Jack Kramer, who last year offered Mo a fat contract for a professional tour, held his tongue, but there was some hope for him. "If it hadn't been for the accident, I would have turned pro last year," Mo admitted. "[Now] I just don't feel up to it. We'll see what happens."

Mo's immediate ambitions are far more decisive. "I've got to learn how to bake an apple pie. That's his [Brinker's] favorite dessert."

Badminton's Joe Alston

BADMINTON is a game which consists of batting a cork ball with feathers stuck in it back and forth over a net. A backyard version of it can be played by anybody with enough strength to stand up straight and enough wind to whistle a chorus of *Break the News to Mother* in Guy Lombardo tempo.

But championship badminton is one of the world's fastest games. Shuttlecocks (the feathered cork balls aforementioned) have been clocked at a speed of 110 mph as they leave the racket. After an hour of this version of the game, a man's legs ache, his head throbs, his breath comes in lung-stabbing fits, his stomach muscles scream and all the while he must wear a poker face lest his opponent suspect that he is ripe for the kill. So says Joseph Cameron Alston (*see cover*), the 28-year-old FBI agent of San Diego, Calif. who will be the mainstay of the U.S. badminton team scheduled to meet Canada in the American zone finals of the Thomas Cup matches in Winnipeg on March 11 and 12.

"It's really a funny game," Joe

Alston said one evening last week as he finished a workout in the Pasadena armory. "It's hard for people to realize how much there really is to it when all they see is some elderly couple playing in a backyard. But if they saw the same couple playing golf or tennis it would look a little boring, too."

Alston, the best player in the U.S. and one of the best in the world, is living proof that you don't have to be a big man to play championship badminton; he stands 5 foot 8, weighs 145. He is a stickler for training and, when his FBI job permits, practices faithfully every night with the other prospective members of the Thomas Cup team. Sure to go to Winnipeg with Joe are Wynn Rogers, 36, perennial national doubles champion; Bobby Williams, 32, probably the hardest hitter in the game; Carl Loveday, 24, and Dick Mitchell, 33. The sixth place on the team (the Davis Cup team of badminton) will go to Bill Perry, 25, of San Diego or to Manuel Armendariz, 21, a UCLA student.

If they listen to Joe Alston, the youngsters on the team will practice every minute they can salvage from their jobs or studies. They must not only get in the best possible shape but *believe* they are in even better shape than that.

"It sounds kind of ridiculous," says Alston, "but you've just got to believe that you're in better shape than the other guy. Even when it begins to hurt, you've got to tell yourself that this cannot be because you are in too good shape to have such a thing happen to you."

Joe Alston is married, and the question naturally arises, "What does a wife think when her husband races off to the badminton court every evening after work?"

Mrs. Alston thinks it is just fine. She happens to be ranked No. 3 among the women badminton players of the country and, with Joe, holds the national mixed doubles championship.

News of Nearco

RACE TRACK SCHOLARS will react immediately to the name of Nearco, the great Italian horse who climaxed a string of 14 straight victories by winning the Grand Prix in Paris in 1938. Late word on the subsequent fortunes of Nearco was available last week and straight from the owner's mouth, too. In New York, homeward bound to England after a vacation in Nassau, Martin Benson, who paid \$300,000 for Nearco after his Grand Prix victory, revealed that his prize possession (now 20 years old) is as prolific a sire as ever and will be visited this year by 40 mares in the interest of improving the breed.

Mr. Benson, a sprightly, white-haired man in his 70s, could not have been approached at a better time.

"I call your attention," he said happily, "to just three races at Hialeah last week. Sixth race on Thursday. Winner, Mandil. Mandil is by Nasrullah out of Golden Apple, and Nasrullah is a son of Nearco. All right. Seventh race same day. Winner, Kabob. By Sayajira out of Frying Pan. Sayajira is likewise a son of Nearco."

Mr. Benson put a hand to his mouth to stifle a chuckle of triumph.

"Now," he cried, "Saturday at Hialeah. The Flamingo Stakes. Winner, Nashua! By Nasrullah again—out of Segula!"

Smacking a folded sports section of his newspaper, Mr. Benson rested his case with: "Need any more be said?"

Nearco is the star boarder but not the only one, by any means, at Mr. Benson's Beech House Stud near Newmarket in Suffolk. Another stallion for whom Benson has high hopes is Faubourg II, who also has a full appointment book for this year. "When I say my stud is one of the best in all England," said Mr. Benson, "I say so unblushingly."

For years Mr. Benson was referred to in U.S. sports pages as "London's leading bookie." He said he was nothing of the sort. "What I was," he declared with dignity, "was London's leading turf accountant."

Sport of queens

IF the merchant seaman of legend is a boozier and a brawler who spends all his time ashore in the handiest waterfront saloons, then the legend stands in urgent need of repair. When the *Queen Mary* arrived at her Hudson River pier one day last week, most of the crew headed straight for a soccer field across the street where the First Class Waiters were scheduled to play the Engine Room in the final of a soccer tournament for the ship's Knock-out Cup, an 18-inch silver trophy annually awarded to the best of the

Mary's seven soccer teams. With members of the other teams (Cabin Class, Tourist, Kitchen, Deck and Engineers) cheering them on, the Waiters served the Engine Room lads with a 3-0 defeat. The Waiters were so clearly the better team that no one even bothered to make a point of the fact that the



referee, Tom Goulding, just happened to be a first class waiter himself.

Later, aboard ship, Mr. Peter Sands Johnson, assistant pantryman and football manager of the *Mary*, said that the crew as a whole was quite keen about soccer and, for that matter, the other sports sponsored by the ship's Social and Athletic Club. "We're not seeking publicity, you know," said Mr. Johnson, trimming a sandwich for tea time, "but I believe it would be quite all right to say that we also go in for cricket on Staten Island, and darts and table tennis, as well."

Mr. Johnson, a man in his thirties who bears not a little resemblance to Anthony Eden, thought a moment. Then, with true British restraint, he went on:

"I suppose there's no harm in saying that we also have a ship's team made up of the best players on the departmental teams. The ship's team plays other ships that happen to be in port, like the *Media* and *Queen of Bermuda*, our neighbors along the piers. But, mind you, we're not seeking to attract attention or anything of that sort. We just happen to be keen on sports, that's all. Same thing holds true on the Q.E. [the *Queen Elizabeth*], but I shouldn't presume to speak for their chaps."

Mr. Johnson said the sports programs are concentrated on this side of the Atlantic. On the other side, he said, a chap wants to get home to his family.



Kovarik