

## Those Depression Years

At the 1932 Relays, Announcer Ted Canty called 1929, "3 B. D.—Before Depression." Depression notwithstanding, the Relays had a fine decade in the 1930's. So outstanding were the attractions, that Saturday reserve tickets never fell below \$2. This was the era of Jesse Owens, Jack Torrance, Eddie Tolan, Ed Gordon, Ralph Metcalfe, George Saling, Glenn Hardin, Jim Bausch, and Cornelius Warmerdam. They were the best in the world, brought to Des Moines by Relays Directors Ossie Solem and Franklin "Pitch" Johnson.

Illinois again was the dominant team with eight relay and 11 individual titles. Some 44 schools had individual winners, including Nebraska with eight champions. Relays were won by 27 universities. Notre Dame, with Canadian Olympian Alex Wilson and later the Irish coach, won seven, and Rice and Indiana, six each. Running for Indiana in several victories was the man who became the seventh director of the Relays—Tom Deckard.

Kansas State, Emporia, led 17 winning colleges with 15 relay champions. Out-of-state high schools had won 16 of 36 relays in the 1920's. Only the 14 titles won by Washington High of Cedar Rapids saved face for the Hawkeye State. Iowa high



school teams, however, won 28 of 40 relays in the 1930's. Davenport won six and Clinton four.

The farthest traveling victor, during this decade, was Greenville, Mississippi, twice the mile relay record-setter. Schools from Minnesota, Kansas, Illinois, South Dakota, Missouri, and Nebraska earned victories.

The World and American record pace slowed only slightly in the 1930's. One new World mark was set and two were tied. One American collegiate and eight American records were broken.

In 1932, Bert McGrane, pointing out how close Drake marks were to world standards, wrote, "Amazing efforts are needed to break records." But nine Drake marks fell that year with world records equaled by Ralph Metcalfe, with a 9.5 hundred, and by George Saling, Iowa's hurdler from Corydon, with 14.4 for the 120 highs. Henry Brocksmith anchored Indiana to a 10:19.1 American distance medley record and set an American collegiate mark of 9:13.6 for the 2-mile run.

The 2-mile was a featured event in this decade. Ray Sears of Butler won it three straight years from 1933 through 1935. Then in 1936, Don Lash of Indiana set an American record of 9:10.6. Notre Dame's Greg Rice ran 9:10 in 1939 for an American collegiate mark.

The 480-yard shuttle hurdle produced two American records. Illinois, anchored by Lee Sentman, lowered their own mark to 1:01.9 in 1930.



Then a picked team of Sam Allen of Oklahoma Baptist, Jack Herring of Texas A. & M., George Fisher of L. S. U., and Lee Haring of Kansas State, Emporia, ran 59.8 in a special 1934 event.

The year 1934 was one of stellar performances. The weather was perfect both days, and defending national champion Louisiana State brought sensational performers. Nathan Blair set a javelin record of 209.21 ft. Glenn Hardin, who would win an Olympic 400-meter hurdle title, anchored a 7:42.8 2-mile relay, only 1.4 seconds over the world's record. Then, there was Jack Torrance. "Baby Jack" weighed 280. Prior to his entry in the shot put ring, the farthest any man had ever thrown the 16-pound shot was 53 ft.  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. But Torrance, getting unusual height, pushed the ball 55 ft.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. to break the world mark by an amazing 2 ft. 1 in. The next day before a record 18,000 fans, he became the eighth man to win two events at a Relays, with a discus throw of 150 ft. 11 in.

There were other 1934 stars. Ralph Metcalfe, the powerful Marquette sprinter, despite an injured thigh, won the 100-yard in 9.7. This was his third straight title. Later, he anchored Marquette to a 440 victory.

The same year, 1934, produced a memorable high school relay. The North Des Moines team, composed of Fred Morrow, Eugene Jones, Warren Nixon, and Jimmy Lyle, raced the prep 2-mile in 8:12.6. This record stood for 21 years. Anoth-



er high school standout that year was Kansas Vocational of Topeka, a school of only 47 boys that won two relays, breaking the mile relay record.

In 1934, the college field was split into two divisions, an action based on observation of the freshman eligibility rule. Other 1934 "firsts" were the use of a wind velocity machine and a new track rule that produced a disqualification.

The rule voided a medley record. In 1933, Myron Pilbrow of Grinnell had carried the baton in his shirt, anchoring a 4-mile win. But when an Abilene Christian runner did it in 1934, his team was in violation. Runner-up Kansas State, Pittsburg, received gold watches from Relays queen, Martha Stull of Northwestern.

By 1935, 32,000 athletes had competed at Drake, and syndicated columnist Alan Gould wrote, "Drake and Penn are in a bitter bid for track athletes that has been getting livelier, if not actually more acrimonious the last few years. Last year, L.S.U., led by Jack Torrance, withdrew from Penn on short notice and went to Des Moines, pleading the necessity for a shorter trip to avoid classroom complications."

L.S.U. was at Penn in 1935, but Relays Director Pitch Johnson persuaded Ohio State, with Jesse Owens, to switch its entry to Des Moines. So, the Athlete of the Half-Century was at Drake. Owens, one of the greatest high school performers of all time, had enjoyed a fine indoor season.



On a chilly, windy Friday, Owens injured an ankle warming up for the broad jump. With ankle taped, he came back to the jump area. Bert McGrane wrote, "Owens, careful not to foul, took off so far behind the board that he went well over 27 feet in the air." The official measurement was 26 ft.  $1\frac{3}{4}$  in. Saturday, 17,000 came on a fair, cool afternoon, and Owens tied the Relays record with a fluid-smooth 9.5 hundred. Eddie Tolan prophesied, "Owens will be the next Olympic champ."

With some vaulters using new metal poles and others preferring the snap of bamboo, Jack Rand of San Diego State, national champ, vaulted 13 ft.  $8\frac{1}{4}$  in.

A high jumper from Harlan, who was recruited by Pitch Johnson in a Drake class meet, won the Relays title for the second time. Linn Philson was the jumper, and he went on to become national champion. Iowa, with Andy Dooley, Wilson Briggs, Carl Nelson, and Jim Owen—the latter two, prep stars at previous Relays—won the 440 and set a record 1:26 in the 880 preliminary, before losing to Texas in the final. Iowa's Mark Panther set a javelin mark of 210.74 feet.

In all, Iowa collegians won eight relays and 10 individual championships in the decade. Iowa had three relay victories, including a record 3:15.4 in the mile by Fred and Carl Teufel, John Graves, and Milton Billig in 1938, and a shuttle hurdle win in 1932. The makeup of that team was so undecid-



ed that two men, Cadwallader and Handorf, staged a special Relays race. Winner Everett Handorf joined LaRue Thurston, Miles Jackson, and George Saling in the victory.

Iowa State, with Lloyd Nagel, Charles Henderson, Earl Labertew, and Ray Putnam, set a distance medley record of 10:21.6 in 1931, and Labertew anchored a 2-mile victory in 1933. Drake ran 10:21 to win the medley in 1937 with Harrison Kohl, Bob Horstmeier, Ray Mahannah, and Bill Feiler. Coe, featuring Harley and Lowell Wedgbury, won a college mile relay in 1938.

Two Iowans, Ed Gordon and Linn Philson, won three gold medals in the jumps, Philson tying for two titles. L. D. Weldon, after winning the javelin for Graceland in 1928, won for Iowa in 1930. Two Drake athletes, Paul Schneeman and Bill Feiler, won titles: Schneeman, the 1933 triple jump and Feiler, the 1937 2-mile.

The most startling win by an Iowan was by Iowa State's Bob Hager in 1931. Lee Sentman of Illinois had twice won the high hurdles—in 1929 and 1930. But Hager, coached by Bob Simpson, beat Sentman in a record 14.7. The previous record, which had stood for 14 years, had been held by Coach Simpson.

Victors in the 1930's won over big fields. By 1931, there were 3,000 competitors. The preceding year, there were 67 entries in the 100-yard dash. The *Tribune* called the race, "the dash of



the century," Cy Leland of Texas Christian won, with Claude Bracey second, Eddie Tolan third.

Parker Shelby of Oklahoma won his third high jump title in 1930. This was the first time a man had won his event three straight years. During the decade, he was joined by 3-timers Ed Gordon, Ralph Metcalfe, Ray Sears, and Linn Philson. Two other athletes started 3-year streaks during the era. Fred Wolcott of Rice lowered the high hurdle record to 14.2 in 1938 and won again the next year. Billy Brown of L.S.U. won the 1939 broad jump. Brown, who made the Olympic team when only 16, won the 100 also in 1939, but injuries slowed him in later years.

The era had many stars. Tommy Warne of Northwestern vaulted 13 ft. 11 in. and narrowly missed a world's record try of 14 ft. 2 in. in 1930. That same year Jim Bausch of Kansas took the shot and Ed Gordon of Iowa the broad jump. Bausch became the 1936 decathlon victor. Sophomore Peyton Glass of Oklahoma A. & M. thwarted Eddie Tolan's final bid for a Relays title in 1931. Glass won the 100 in 9.7, but Tolan's anchor in Michigan's 880 relay was unforgettable.

Alex Wilson of Notre Dame anchored a 1932 2-mile relay win in 1:53.1. It is called "the fastest 880 ever at Drake." Then, in 1938, Lee BeDillon of Kansas State, Pittsburg, was clocked in 1:52 in a sprint medley victory. But the 880 of the decade was run by "Froggy" Lovvorn of Pepperdine and



Robert Liby of Kansas State, Emporia, in the 1939 college 2-mile relay. Both ran close to 1:51 flat.

Glenn Hardin of L.S.U. ran the best relay 440 of the decade, 47 flat, in 1934, but L.S.U. lost to U.C.L.A. in 3:15.9, breaking Iowa's 1923 record. An equally impressive 440 was by an Olympian, Harold Cagle of Oklahoma Baptist, 47.7 in the 1938 quarter-mile run.

Cornelius Warmerdam, later to be the first 15-foot vaulter, tied for the 1936 title, representing Fresno State. That was the meet that saw new American records in the javelin and 1,000 yards. Alton Terry of Hardin-Simmons threw the javelin 222 ft. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. and Glenn Cunningham of Kansas ran the 1,000 in 2:11.2.

Cunningham was one of several outstanding distance runners as America started a slow climb to international respectability. Charles Fenske of Wisconsin was another. He lowered the 1,000-yard mark to 2:10.7 in 1938. Fenske then out-ran John Munski of Missouri in a distance medley with a 4:10.5 mile to Munski's 4:12.4. This was the fastest recorded in the Relays at that time.

Probably the decade's finest performance by an unknown was by Herschel Neil of Maryville (Mo.) Teachers. Neil won the 100 in 9.7 and the triple jump with 48 ft. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. in 1936. Another double winner was Sam Francis of Nebraska, a football All-American, who won both the shot and discus in 1937 and 1938.



Another Olympian, Mark Robinson of Pasadena Junior College, turned in fine 1937 performances. Robinson, brother of baseball's Jackie, jumped 25 ft. 5½ in., second only to Owens' jump. He also anchored a mile relay win.

Eastern success came in 1937 when John Irwin II of Princeton won the 440 hurdles in 54.8. The next year, Jack Patterson of Rice set a record 53.2 for the event. As both a Baylor and University of Texas coach, Patterson has brought many teams to Drake. The 1938 meet saw a powerful runner from Tuskegee Institute, Mozelle Ellerbe, run a winning hundred in 9.6.

This was a decade in which two of Iowa's national high school champs, John Graves of Cherokee and Carl Nelson of Clinton, figured in both prep and university victories. Half-miler Graves and sprinter Nelson ran on University of Iowa teams that set records.

National reporting of the Relays increased in the 1930's. Frank Young of the *Kansas City Call* started coverage in 1931 for Negro papers in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Norfolk. Paramount News was at Drake in 1933; by 1936 Fox and Pathe News were on hand. N.B.C. sportscasters Wally Butterworth and Paul Dumont broadcast the 1931 meet from a glass booth in the stands. Two radio networks, C.B.S. and Mutual, carried the 1937 Relays with Gene Shumate announcing for C.B.S. and Reggie Mar-



tin for Mutual. A former broadcaster returned for the 1939 meet. Ronald Reagan came from Hollywood. The *Tribune*, in reporting his breakfast with Relays Queen Laura Dille of Missouri, declared "Reagan boyishly and blushingly related filmdom experiences during the breakfast." The *Register* reported, "Reagan's witty remarks at the ceremony crowning the queen rolled them in the aisles."

A team from California came to the same meet, although their school could give them only \$100. San Diego State runners passed the hat in their downtown area and the necessary \$320 was raised.

Major Griffith continued to return. In 1933, he called Des Moines "one of the six best track cities in the United States." That year a former high school great completed a cycle. Charles Hoyt, then Michigan coach, was Relays referee. Another returnee was Ira Davenport—1911 and 1912 hero—who marveled at the size of the 1939 meet.

It was an era of mostly good Relays days, with a pesky snowstorm in the 1937 scene. It was an era of levity and sadness. Levity came with the Bellboys' Relay, originally staged downtown with bellhops carrying suitcases instead of batons.

Sadness came in 1931. One of the early and great friends of the Relays had been killed a month before in a plane crash in a Kansas field. Knute Rockne was dead. Irish runners wore black arm bands as 11,000 stood in Rockne's memory.