

Comment by the Editor

THE PLIGHT OF THE HISTORIAN OF SPORT

A race is a complete dramatic episode. With the crack of the starter's pistol the action begins. Instantly a scene is created. Each of the actors assumes a rôle and plays his part with all the spirit in him. Nobody knows the plot of the race, not even the runners, and none can foretell the finish. Given the elements of rivalry, ambition, honor, skill, and endurance, a drama is made that has action, suspense, and a climax. The character of the runners is clearly portrayed as the contest proceeds. Whether the race is a plain exhibition of speed or of strategy, it is a thrilling cross-section of life, revealing the forces of conduct as truly as a play on the stage.

Though a race or a game is a ready-made drama, the writers of sport ignore their natural advantage and write insipidly according to a standard formula. When almost every contest is replete with incidents that make spectators cheer, the wistful fans who can not go must be content to read the names of contestants, a list of events, and the records or the score. Colored sport pages are filled with statistics and pictures, as if a reader

could reconstruct a game from an abbreviated box score and a likeness of the shortstop. Such an account is just about as exciting as a market report to a boy who has never invested.

But the plight of the historian is even more tragic. He finds no satisfaction in asking some casual observer for the details of the game, because the particulars of athletic competition are not remembered accurately. Dependent almost entirely upon the meager jargon of the sport page, he is grateful for play-by-play reports, box scores, and diagrams. With all the statistical aid that the papers furnish, he must still supply the vital elements of color, character, and circumstance from the resources of his own imagination. While a devotee of baseball might visualize a game in detail from the record in the score book, not much of the action in a race can be gleaned from the distance and time.

If journalists are unduly reticent in the use of graphic verbs, their deficiency is abundantly compensated by the sustained exuberance of radio announcers who are obliged to tell the world exactly what they see and think. Phonograph records could be made of the vivid descriptions they broadcast. And the historian of the future may verify his explanations with motion pictures.

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