

TENNIS, A WORLD SPORT EPIDEMIC

In This Country All Ages and Both Sexes Are Wielding the Racquet With Increasing Joy and Skill

At first glance there appears to be no more connection between the building trade and lawn tennis than there is between a Harvard post-graduate medical course and a school of fishes, but if the truth must be made known, the stagnation in the building of suburban homes is the only snag that this greatest of tennis seasons has struck.

Competent observers have estimated that 90 per cent. of the tennis courts in this country are privately owned, and naturally it follows that the said owners must live where there is room for more than an airshaft between the houses. A garage and a tennis court are just as much adjuncts to an up-to-date suburban cottage as "all modern plumbing." Therefore, the lack of activity in the building of new Summer homes and their accessories is interfering in the progress of tennis, but the impetus from other sources has put such new life into the game that it is gaining popularity more rapidly than ever.

Some years ago, and not such a long time either, the proletariat had a grudge against tennis. The man in the street said it was too much of an afternoon tea affair. The baseball fan remarked that there were too many hyphens in the names in the box scores—to wit, J. De Puyster Chapleigh-Haworth defeated C. Van-Brunton DeG. Oligarchy, 6-4, 6-4, 6-0. A great deal of that feeling went out when the annual national championship was transferred from the sacred precincts of Newport to the more enterprising, if less socially elite, New York. Even the devotees of the boxing game admit that there is a chance of salvation for any game in which the champion answers to the name of "Bill." Just one glimpse of William M. Johnston, the California whirlwind, in action on the courts, is enough to convince the scoffers that tennis has long left the tea table stride and is going forward in seven-league boots.

The Sport of Millions.

Three or four decades ago there were not enough tennis players in this country to put up a one-man auto top, but now they can be marshaled by Army Corps. How many are there? The fair tennis enthusiast with the \$15 racquet and the \$10 macramé wave may lean over the net and gush, "Why, dear me, every one plays tennis, else they simply do not count, you know!" The disgruntled race-track better, returning from an event where he might have won some money had the horses been pointed the other way at the finish, would probably opine that "Yeah, tennis? I do believe there's a lot a people playing that stuff, mostly young ladies of both sexes." Between these two extremes Fred Alexander—than whom there is no than whomer in tennis lore—offers the "auream medicritem" of Horace, the golden mean. In his opinion there are more than three million tennis players in this country putting them into the net and over the backstop this season. The speed with which tennis has recruited this vast army casts into the shade the classic feat of sowing the dragon's teeth to raise an emergency supply of armed supporters.

All armies need supplies. Thousands of acres of forest go down before the ax each year to furnish forth an American holiday. The woods are combed for ash trees for the frames of the tennis racquets, the rubber tree in the Congo or on the bank of the Amazon is tapped for the rubber for the ball (the felt cover for which is NOT cut from the hides of dormice), and last but not least, not a single cat is sacrificed on the altar to provide the "catgut" stringing. "Catgut" is a misnomer. The best quality stringing is of lamb's gut, which you may have stretched on your racquet at a cost of \$8, of which the lamb gets nothing. Going down a little lower in the social scale, and the scale of prices, there comes a mixture of lamb's gut with the intestines of the plebeian hog. In the lowest category is a "catgut" that sinks almost beyond recognition, for it is neither cat nor gut, but a fabric made up by the industrious Japanese, containing among other things, fibre and silk.

Like everything else, the High Cost of Sporting has hit tennis. The felt-covered balls are now just twice what they were "in the good old days before

the war." The racquet has not taken quite such a jump, but it costs more than an evening newspaper, and the breaking of the strings is now an occasion for the whole family to go into deep mourning. The manufacturers are hustling to keep up with the demand, but labor and transportation difficulties have left many players in straits where they are thundering on the doors of the sporting goods houses demanding the implements of war. The only bad outlook for the future is the shortage of good ash timber for the frames of future racquets.

Epidemic Summer Exercise.

If there are 3,000,000 tennis players in this country, where do they play? The answer is, they play from coast to coast, from Atlantic City to Coronado Beach, from Brownsville and Tia Juana to New Brunswick and Vancouver. For the average player the Summer vacation is the time to get in the deadly work at tennis. The top spin and the chop stroke, neatly executed, create terrible havoc in feminine hearts at the Summer resorts. There are four great tennis centres in this country, however, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and California. The historic courts at Longwood, of course, are the hub of the Boston tennis firmament, while the West Side Club not only takes care of the best that New York has to offer, but also annually handles the All-Comers classic, the national amateur tennis championship of the year.

Philadelphia has two live tournament clubs in the Philadelphia Cricket Club and the Merion Cricket Club, and in California the whole State is such a hotbed of tennis that it would be impossible to pick out any particular spot as the centre except San Francisco, and that only on account of its size.

One great factor that brought the game of tennis more generally before the public eye was the prominence given it by President Roosevelt during his residence at the White House. Naturally any game that was being propelled by the sizzling energy and the potent personality of the late T. R. was headed for distinction at no distant date. The whole country knew him for a two-fisted no-quarter fighter, a hunter of men and beasts, a terror in legislative halls and the boxing ring. If such a man could play, enjoy and praise tennis, it must be a great game. Though Roosevelt might be wrapped up to his ears in his studies of birds, beasts, reptiles and foreign diplomacy, he took time out every day to shoot the ball down the alley or to smash away at his opponent's back-hand. The "Tennis Cabinet" ruled the country, the great powers saw to it that their Ambassadors here were adepts on the courts, and a foreign representative who knew not tennis was as much at home as a white rabbit at

be at an Old Home Week of the Timber Wolf Family, Inc.

Then came the advent of the Californians. It was the dawning of a new era in tennis. Born and raised far from the Newport tennis régime, the youthful Californians battled away on the coast against each other with no regard for speed laws. Some of them played on asphalt courts where the ball bounded so fast that most of the best strokes were made in self-defense. Hitting terrific serves, they were down like a flash to the net for the return.

Good-bye, Ping-Pong Tennis.

The first Easterner who ran up against "Red" McLaughlin, the California Comet, thought he was playing against Kellar, the Magician. Eastern conservative tennis put up a stiff fight against the invaders, but their doom was sealed. "Ping-pong" tennis went out, and "Whizz-bang" tennis came in. Our champions up to this time had been masters of the conservative game. Wright, Larned, Ward and Alexander were the types that topped the field for years, canny veterans with a wicked eye for placements and a perfect knowledge of the weaknesses of their opponents. Steadiness and accuracy was their motto, and adherence to it brought them, and held them, in the first rank in American tennis. The creed of the Californians was speed and more speed, and youth came to the fore with a rush. Now the tennis leaders are young men well inside the thirty year mark.

The American team that goes to England to fight for the Davis Cup is composed of just such young men; William M. Johnston, national singles champion; R. Norris Williams, runner-up to Johnston; William T. Tilden, 2d, national indoor champion, and Charles S. Garland, Jr., intercollegiate champion. This aggregation carries not only the hopes but the expectations of American sport followers that the international trophy will be successfully ravaged from the defiant Australians, who laid violent hands upon the said trophy about the time of the opening of the war. That remarkable tournament for the Davis Cup brought out thousands of spectators, who went into ecstasies over the brilliant playing of both teams. Though America lost the Cup, there was at least the satisfaction that, through his victories over Brookes and Wilding, "Red Mac" of California was ranked as the foremost tennis player of the world by no less an authority than John Bull himself.

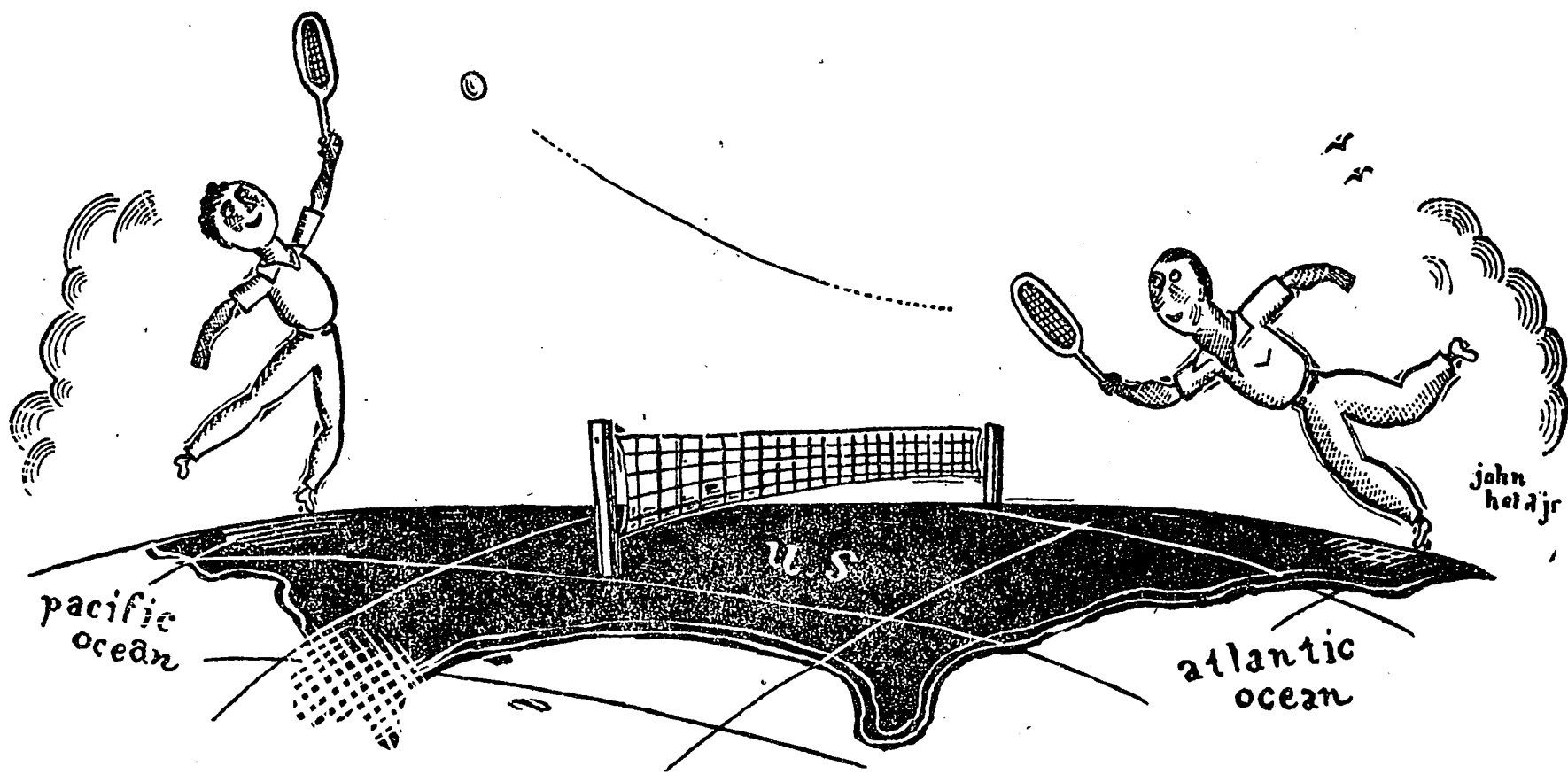
Passing from the Davis Cup prospects to tennis of a slightly different grade, the courts in the public parks of this and every other city are busier than ever this season. About dawn the players begin to mobilize, and "the earliest pipe of half-awakened birds" finds them stringing up their nets and complaining about the snakelike pattern of the centre

line. All through the day they keep hard at it, ousting and being ousted in their turn as their time expires and other holders of permits demand their rights. To the casual observer who may wander by the dozens of courts in Central Park it may seem that public parks tennis consists in gaudy but not neat apparel, a diversified assortment of feminine shrieks and a remarkable facility in hitting the ball into neighboring courts. No one is more surprised than the young lady herself when she essays a "McLoughlin" serve and with unerring and fatal precision smites the elderly gentleman in the next court on his prominent bald spot. But watch those youngsters, too. They seem a bit wild, but the easy, natural style of youth is there, and development is all that is needed to produce a first-rate player. The growth of municipal golf links and tennis courts, and the support of the tournaments of these players, is not a thing of long standing, yet its importance to both games is even now bearing fruit, and will do so with increasing vigor in the coming years.

Beginning at Tender Years.

"Catch 'em while they're young," said Stewart Maiden, the golf professional, explaining his method of developing two such champions as he did in Bob Jones of Atlanta and Alexa Stirling, the women's national golf champion, and the same recipe holds good in tennis. The Californians were the first to recognize the importance of the juniors, but Fred Alexander caught hold of the idea and worked hard and successfully to put it through in the East. Just one product of it is enough to justify the veteran. In the junior tournament at Sleepy Hollow some years ago a note was slipped into Alexander's hand by a little chap about 13 years old. The note stated that the youngster was entered in the tournament and would Mr. Alexander see that he caught the right train back to Yonkers after the tournament. The little lad was beaten, of course, but his play so interested Alexander that he bought him a new racquet. The youngster's name was Vincent Richards. He ranks up in the first ten this year.

One reason why the game of tennis is making such strides is because it has a national association which is "right on the job." The United States National Lawn Tennis Association promotes and supervises tournament, interprets the rules and debates them, rules on the eligibility of players, ranks the leaders annually, supports and encourages the game in areas where it is little known, and generally preaches the gospel of the out-of-doors healthful sport. It has a Field Secretary, Paul Williams, at the offices of the association at 20 Broad Street. He is a peripatetic encyclopedia of tennis information and he is as ready to answer the letter of



"They Play from Coast to Coast."

the indignant lady from Oshkosh and tell her why she lost the point when she fell into the net as he is to affirm that tennis takes the first five places in "Leading Sports of the World."

In support of this last statement it may be urged that the sun never sets on vacant courts. When the Great Bear is gazing hungrily at the Milky Way over the heads of American tennis players Old Sol is merrily blazing down on the busy courts of Japan and Australia. The commercial exiles from England have dotted the vast Chinese Empire with little tennis clubs where the drowsy-eyed lovers of the poppy already view the game with interest and essay it in their own peculiar fashion of play. The young Chinese who get their start by picking up the balls for the Europeans are the quickest to learn, but they have not yet reached the stage where W. M. Johnston of California need fear for his laurels at the hands of some resident from the banks of the Hoang-Ho.

Any reader of Kipling knows that tennis was an old story in India when there were only three racquets and a borrowed net in all the United States. Even the Fiji Islanders seek "respite, respite, and Nepenthe" from the spear-throwing of fish by banging the felt-covered ball back and forward over the net. In the Philippines the Americans have installed the game, and in Hawaii, at Honolulu, the thing to do is to have a stiff workout on the courts before seeking the blissful coolness of the breakers on the beach at Waikiki. The French and the Germans have also done their part in spreading the game throughout their foreign possessions, and not a quarter of the globe but points with pride to its courts of hard fast clay or soft green grass, its low clubhouses with the wide verandas, its warm showers—and its cooling drinks.

The answer to all this is that tennis can be played by men, women and children of all ages and previous conditions of servitude. It is an easy thing to learn how to play the game badly and enjoy it greatly. Complete equipment can be carried in a suitcase, and any community that can offer a level piece of ground 100 feet square is capable of supporting a tennis club. It is a sociable game unless the balls stop flying and the racquets start. It is a delightful game for the society "bud," permitting her to display the most piquant costume in a picturesque setting; it's a great game for the growing kids in the parks and around the suburbs of the city, it stretches their limbs and it hardens their muscles; and for the husky young man who wants action, it is a game that calls for speed, agility, courage and endurance of no common variety if one desires to forge to the front in this most cosmopolitan of all games.