

IN SPITE OF THEMSELVES

World Four-Mile Record Relay Team Is Good

It is not so very long since New Zealand looked on Randolph Rose as the be-all and end-all of runners over the classic mile distance. For years he was the only New Zealander who had ever run a mile in less than 4 mins. 20 secs.

Then, out of the hurly-burly of school and club athletics came new names, and new promises to be fulfilled during the last four or five years.

FIRST Lovelock. He ran well at his school, ran reasonably well during his University days at Dunedin, and, almost unexpectedly, suddenly put the world at his feet when he first matched, then outpaced, Jerry Cornes. Boot followed closely in his footsteps.

In sprints, over hurdles, in middle distance races, across country, even in field events, other figures appeared. Pullar was one. Theo. Allen was another. Matthews rose like a star over the Canterbury horizon.

In spite of themselves these four—Boot, Pullar, Allen, Matthews—have become great runners. Pullar especially has broken every training theory. He started in sprints, developed as a harrier, won his first New Zealand title as a hurdler, and now does for Masterton what Randolph Rose did as New Zealand's first great miler. Allen is the same. His early athletic days were a mad and merry mixture of sprinting, cross-country running, and middle distance racing.

But somehow these all-rounders have attained the status of specialists in the distance which the Masterton Amateur Athletic Club will feature on the Oval on February 17.

The Plan

The four of them talked it over after the Empire Games in Australia two years ago. In 1937 a team of four from Indiana University had set a new time for the four-mile relay with an aggregate of 17 mins. 16½ secs. At Masterton this month the New Zealand team will have to average less than 4 mins. 19 secs. to be sure of breaking that record.

It is not so strange that a record like this has held for three years. To cover a mile in less than 4 mins. 20 secs. you have to start fast and stay fast. It is not often possible to find four runners capable of doing that, and harder still to find four runners each able to carry the distance, at speed, more or less on his own initiative.

New Zealand has other runners capable of matching these four when on form. No one among the

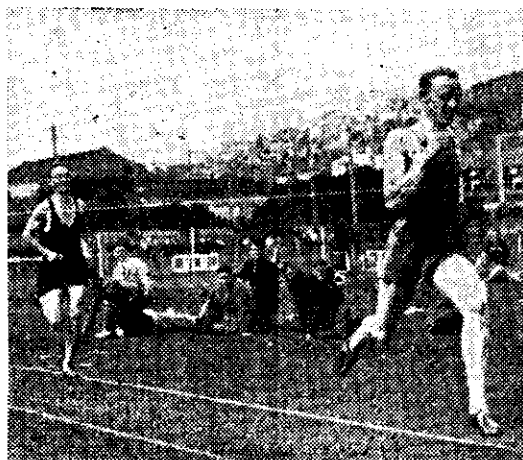
four has ever been invincible on the New Zealand track. Criticisms have in fact been levelled at the composition of the team.

Quite apart from the fact that it is not easy to justify such criticism on technical grounds, the attempt on the record is more or less a private matter. The runners themselves have taken a big part in organising it, with the co-operation of the Masterton Club. The matter is just no one else's business.

Final arrangements for the attempt have not been completed as this is written. The order in which the men will run will be important, and Masterton are trying to make sure of a second good team to take care of the pacemaking. Several other runners have lately been climbing up into this class. The main difficulty will lie in assembling them in the Wairarapa.

The Runners

At Otago Boys' High School Bill Pullar started breaking records. It is hardly possible to say that it was there he first learnt his running. School coach-



FIRST! Theo. Allen, finishing a race at Wellington, when he beat Boot by about five yards

ing facilities were available; but, like Boot, whose record was sketched in *The Listener* last week, Pullar spent his schooldays running in anything that offered. Still under 15 years of age, Pullar established a School junior record of 2 mins. 24 secs. for the half-mile.

Two or three years later he is running in open competition to cover the 880 in 2 mins. 20 secs. while under 18 years of age. At the same time he is winning running sprints, with 10 8/10 secs. for the 100 yards, and winning half-mile open events. In 1931, still in Dunedin, he takes the 880 event with 2 mins. 2½ secs., and two months later, for the Anglican Club, wins a cross-country event. The next year he is still into everything, with placings and good times in both sprint and middle distance races. He wins the Otago junior cross-country championship while Bonny Lovelock is dead-heating with Cornes in the Oxford-Cambridge contest at White City Stadium.

It is the same story in 1933. Pullar wins sprints, and middle distance events, throws a javelin 105 feet, runs in both open and junior events, and appears in the placings for the 120 yards hurdles, junior. But now he is developing. These are only Club events. In the Provincial championships he comes second in the 440 hurdles, second in the 100. Those were the days of Savidan and Barnes. During the winter he is again prominent over country, and comes third to Barnes and Morris in the Otago cross-country.

He Did It

So far Pullar's athletic career had been interesting, but polyglot. It was typical of him that he should make his big chance for himself. In 1934 the



ROUND THE BEND: Bill Pullar has a list to port

Otago Centre left him out of the team to go to Wellington for the New Zealand Championship meeting. Young Pullar dug his toes in and paid his own expenses. In the quarter-mile hurdles he met Arnold Anderson, Canterbury's great hurdler, and a product of the same school as Lovelock and Boot. In the last 50 yards of the race Pullar came up fast on the title holder to drop over the last hurdle a shade ahead and finish the winner in 56½ secs., equal to Anderson's New Zealand record.

The cross-country course at Wingatui, where Lovelock once raced, was the scene of his next big success. As Barnes went out of the picture, Pullar came in. For the Edmond Cup that year Barnes was not available. He had a leg injury. Pullar won in 17 mins. 28 secs., a really fast time, although variations in the course-setting make it impossible to consider records. That year New Zealand's Empire Games team for London was mostly swimmers, with Lovelock running over the mile and half-mile distances. F. J. Grose was riding.

Soon after his Edmond Cup success Pullar won the Otago Cross-Country Championship. This time Barnes was in the race—second over a 10,000 metres course at Wingatui.

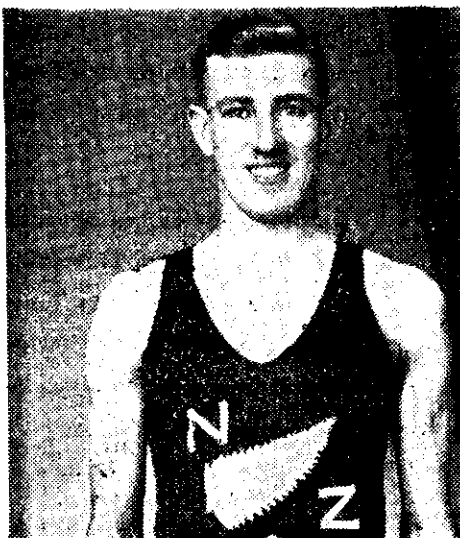
The year after Pullar had won the New Zealand Cross-Country Championship, Savidan stole it back over the Lyall Bay Course in Wellington, but Pullar had plenty of other cards up his sleeve. Continued successes over all sorts of distances kept his name in view for the next Empire Games team, and he starred once again as a harrier when the New Zealand cross-country team raced in Australia in 1935. Savidan was disappointing and could not hold the Australian, Sheaves. Pullar stuck it out in the strange conditions and came home second.

In Canterbury

While Pullar was steering his zig-zag course upward, Canterbury was watching C. H. Matthews running into prominence along the two- and three-mile courses. He had created an Australian record over the 3,000 metres in the Melbourne Centenary Games, and was then only 20 years of age. In the following season he took 8½ secs. off Savidan's three-mile record by running a specially arranged handicap at Christchurch in 14 mins. 18½ secs. Just before then he had run two miles for a New Zealand record of 9 mins. 17½ secs. His three-mile time attracted world-wide attention. It was not quite as good as Shrubbs' 1903 time of 14 mins. 17½ secs., and well away from Lehtinen's world figure, but it put him up among the best distance athletes who ever spoke English and secured him nomination for the Olympics, his name coupled with Lovelock's.

Pullar was considered unlucky to miss nomination. Everyone was so disappointed that Boot had been left out that he had to be put in.

(Continued on page 55)



C. H. MATTHEWS: "... A star rose in Canterbury "