



NOTES ON SPORT

NATIONALISM in INTERNATIONAL Sport

Records and Racial Rivalries

IN Finland, athletics are a scientific preoccupation. The Finns run and ski as we in New Zealand play Rugby; but more so. With the deliberation of the northern mind, the Finns state careful theories, make careful experiments, and startle the rest of the world when their theories are put into practice with typical northern efficiency.

They have, for example, compiled a table which attributes by comparison a certain number of points to all results, weighing the effort required for one record against the effort required for another, in all events, by all grades of competitors. Every conceivable factor is considered. From this tabulation, they are able to compare, say, the race run over 100 yards by a junior with the record time over the same or any other distance by a national champion. There is no reason why the junior's performance might not be the better one.

Best of All Time

To J. Torrance, U.S.A., they do honour as the greatest of the great for his shot-put record of 17 metres 40 (57 feet 11 in.) set up in Oslo in 1934. Others had been pegging away at 16 metres, edging the record up, centimetre by centimetre. Torrance was a phenomenon. It was not until last year that another American shot-putter again reached 17 metres.

Second to Torrance comes Owens, for his long jump of 8 metres 13 (26 feet 8 1/4 ins.), set at Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1935. Matti Jarvinen's 253 feet 4 1/2 ins. for the javelin throw (at Helsinki in 1936) would doubtless be the third best field event performance, since in the last available assessment the Finns had listed Nikkanen, who in that season had only thrown about 232 feet.

On the track, first place goes again to America, for Towns's time of 13.7 secs. for the 110 metres hurdles.

After him comes the German Harbig, and therein lies a tale.

In these mad days of records, when everyone must be first to do something, even if it be only standing on his head on a monument, it has become useless to pretend that sport is international. It has, in fact, been insanely national. To believe otherwise is to think wishfully.

The Limit

It is not long since it was scientifically decided that no human being could run

a mile in faster time than 4 mins. Since then the world record has come to within a few seconds of the "minimum," with Glen Cunningham holding an unofficial world record a little more than four seconds outside "the limit of human powers." This season the Americans Cunningham, Bonthron, San Romani, Venzke, Rideout, have been running weekly over a one-mile indoor track. In their second major run (out of season, let it be noted), three of them beat 4 mins. 10 secs. In their third, the time was not so good. By the time this is printed they will have tried again. By the time the open season begins they will either be in line for an attempt on Cunningham's time, or dead. Are they doing this for fun, or do they justify the opinion of even their own sports writers, who contend they do it because Americans *must* run faster than Germans, or Frenchmen, or Finns, or Italians, or Britons?

History

The story of Harbig is the story of post-Bismarck Germany. As a nation, Germany is little older than Japan, and Japan is young enough. In seventy years Germany has fought her way through five major wars to her present position in international affairs. Part of her development—and no small part—has been the development of national sports. Germany has had to justify herself in the eyes of the rest of the world. In all things she has demanded recognition, if not as the superior of other nations, at least as their equal. Over the last ten years this process has been intensified, and a big part of the process has been the development of athletics as a means of attaining racial superiority. In great new stadiums and training camps, all the youth of the country has been encouraged to train, train, train. Harbig is the justification, if that is the word, for the system. He is the apple of the Sportsfuehrer's eye.

It was last year, at Milan, that Harbig made his record for the 800 metres. It has been difficult to check up on official confirmation of his time as a world record; but at least there has been no contradiction. Against the Italian Lanzi, who ran second to Woodruff at the Berlin Olympics, Harbig ran the 800 metres in 1 min. 46.6 secs. The listed world record is held by the American, Elroy Robinson, who ran the course in 1 min. 49.6 secs., at New York in 1937.

No Specialist

Harbig ran at the Berlin Games without attracting unusual attention. But in

the following year, running in France, he began to look like a world champion. Since then he has never been beaten over the distance in which he specialises. But he is not a one-distance specialist. He runs easily over 400 metres and, in fact, represented Germany over that distance the day after he had met and beaten Lanzi at Milan over 800 metres. In the 400 metres he won in 46.1 secs. equalling Brown's European record. Harbig has also covered the 100 metres in 10.6 secs. (to equal the French record), and the 200 metres in 21.5 secs. (to better the French record, as the French noticed at the time).

Soon after Harbig beat Lanzi, the Italian was invited to a return match in Berlin. It did not require much discernment on the part of a French sports writer who pointed out at the time that the German authorities hoped to make Lanzi the sacrifice for a Berlin holiday. Lanzi evidently also saw the point, for he was not having any. ("Harbig is very fast. Lanzi is very vain," said the French.)

The Superior Finns

Over long distances, the Finns are supreme. They are famous for sportsmanship. They run well. They run efficiently. They run largely for the sake of running. But they also run for Finland. In a race, their tactics are frankly meant to defeat the others, as much as to bring about a win for themselves. But over their own distances their very supremacy carries them out of the ruck of most of the jealousies dominating other events.

Keenest rivals before this war were the Americans and the Germans. Their methods were somewhat similar, but not absolutely.

The Americans concentrate on the very best of their talent. They find a Torrance. They train him. They keep him to a training schedule which would make an English university athlete retire to the cloisters and get drunk for despair. When he has reached the peak of his form, the American prodigy naturally breaks a record. Then he swiftly becomes once again a normal human being.

The system which produced Harbig has a much wider scope. All Germans must be good athletes. It is not sufficient that two or three selected runners should take part in a big race. In Germany there must be a whole field of good runners, with another wave to follow them, and another after that. Out of this multitude of forced talent, inevitably, the great runner appears.

Thirty-three

So far the Americans are ahead. They hold 33 world records. Germany has one: Willie Schroder's 174 feet 2 1/2 ins. for the discus throw (Magdeburg, 1935). Finland has ten. Great Britain has six. France has one; and New Zealand one (Lovelock's 1,500 metres).

However, what they have lacked in material success the Germans have lately been making up in determination, and it is hard to say where their undoubtedly efficient system would have carried them but for the current disturbance.

In France, also, history has had something to do with sport. Where Germany in 1870 became a nation and found it advisable to let the rest of the world hear about the achievement, France in that year became the vanquished, and found it necessary to rehabilitate herself.

Economy

The French have taken a keen interest in athletics. They have done well, but not notably well. The French prefer to play. When they can play they play well. They are good at tennis, for tennis is a game. But into so serious business as athletics they cannot put their whole heart and, in any case, it does not appeal to the French idea of economy to "squeeze the orange," as they describe the forcing methods used elsewhere. They grow potatoes at Versailles, cultivate railway embankments, believe that to cut a tree for firewood is financial suicide, and conserve their manpower on the track as closely as they conserve cabbages in a plot.

Each year they like to see the same men running again. This is economy of effort. It appeals to them. When they look at America's prodigality, they are horrified. Where, they ask, are Towns, Torrance, Owens, Woodruff (who ran with a stride of nearly seven feet), or Peacock? Where, they ask, is Hardin, star of the 400 metres hurdles, or Johnson, Albritton, Walker, the Negro high jumpers?

Even Germany's methods are preferred to this. In Germany, says the French, they train men, and not super-men.

Ourselves

For us, of course, there is as much satisfaction in losing as there is in a win. To accept defeat gracefully makes the other fellow look so silly . . .

And we do not do so badly.