

TAKING A TUMBLE

Another Moan By A Solitary Sportsman

This week, at the invitation of the gentleman who usually writes the sports page, an interloper creeps in. He, as one who has always taken his sport in solitary doses, makes a plea for purely individual forms of physical recreation—with emphasis on his pet sport of tumbling. Don't be thrown about on the football field, he says. Throw yourself about instead.

IF there is one thing more boring to me than Lord Haw-Haw of Hamburg and the egg-laying results, it is organised sport. Those, you will say, are strong words, brother! But a timid squeak of protest never did stop a hurricane or a Hun—hence my vehemence.

Having seen for some years an endless cavalcade of raw-boned youths flinging themselves in ungainly pursuit of a greasy leather ball, or standing about on a field in inadequate garments, or leaping frantically on hot asphalt, or even lacerating each other in roped squares, I now protest. No doubt all these manifestations of exuberance have some good in them. We are constantly hearing the expression "team spirit." It is certainly an admirable quality; but here again a quavering doubt enters.

Team spirit to these jaundiced eyes occasionally seems nothing more than pushing some unfortunate gentleman's face in the mud or jumping on his defenceless stomach to save your pal the trouble. And with that, as with slave-trading and the price of whisky, I emphatically disagree. Can it be too daring to suggest that the triumph of the team often becomes the triumph of a mutual admiration society?

The Crowning Evil

In all this, of course, the crowning flower of evil is the Great Mass that sits on a bank and watches and watches from a bank and sits and sits on its unimaginative seat, as "Thid" put it recently, and occasionally announces its continued existence by a raucous cheer as some ragged, panting, and pop-eyed band of sportsmen succeeds at long last in conveying a grubby sphere from one

end of a field to the other by dint of wholesale slaughter and disablement of a similar group of their fellow men.

The delight evinced by the Great Mass at the spectacle of a number of other human being sweating and swearing and attacking each other with murderous intent for the sake of one leather sphere is, I feel, not unlike the unhealthy amusement with which a small boy contemplates a fly whose wings he has just removed.

More Pleasant Things

Having worked the vitriol out of my system, let me proceed to more pleasant and apposite matters. This article is primarily a plea for unorganised sport—with special reference to the sport of tumbling.

Having sat for five, or five and a-half, days in an office, our blood stream has grown turgid, our eyes are somewhat rheumy, our pigments have gone pallid on us, our metabolism is definitely lower than it was, and our ergs of energy are practically non-existent. Obviously a bracer—and I don't mean one in a glass—is called for. Enter here the gentle art of tumbling.

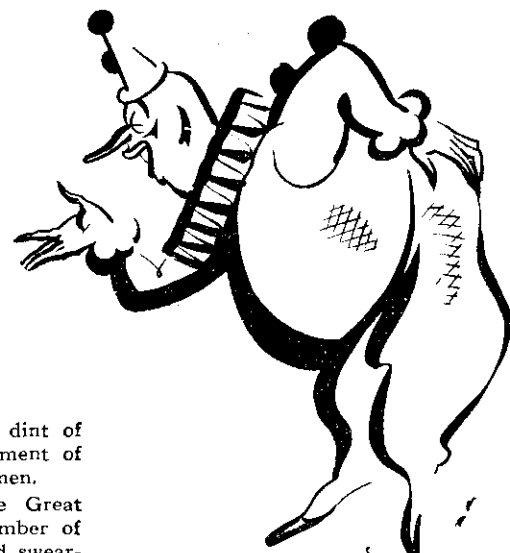
What is tumbling? Tumbling is the art of flinging oneself about in abandoned fashion, and it may go on practically anywhere—on a piece of grass, on a beach, in the back-yard, even in the drawing-room, provided the family is out and all breakable objects are fully insured.

The Language of Tumbling

The only thing it has in common with any other kind of sport is that it has a terminology of its own. The language of the tumbler is composed of switches, back rolls, cart wheels, round-offs, hand-springs, elephant walks, snap-ups, head-springs, twist snap-ups and twist hand-springs, cradles, curls, somersaults (backward and forward), gainers, spotters, and half-backs.

It has a history as long as any form of organised sport. The courts of most of the world's great empires and kingdoms have had tumblers and acrobats on the payroll, and some of the most highly-paid members of any circus or variety theatre are the tumblers. Theirs can be almost a fine art.

With summer approaching, unhappy is he who cannot tumble along the sands, who does not know the exhilaration of back somersaults and cartwheels on the glistening reaches of the beaches, who has never learnt how to forget his upright position and abandon his respectability to the delights of flips, snap-ups, and headsprings. Many sports claim to be the best exercise, but in tumbling there is not one muscle that does not play its part, not one corpuscle that



... Cry "Hoop-la!" and toss yourself into space

does not rush along veins and arteries with renewed vigour.

It's Handy if You Fall

This then, is an untrammelled, spontaneous sort of sport. One in which there are no perspiring addicts straining all around, no awesome yells of "On the ball!" "Down with the umpire," or "Take your foot out of my mouth, you —!" to shatter the calm. There's just the wind and the sunlight and a complete sense of well-being and *joie de vivre*. Just the satisfaction of feeling supple, well-trained limbs working smoothly, the æsthetic thrill of describing the perfect parabola or full circle in the air, as you cry "Hoop-la!" and toss yourself into space.

All of which, being rather too poetic, perhaps, let us come down again to earth and mention that tumbling is very handy in case you fall out of anything or off anything. The man who has tumbled is like a cat—he usually lands on his feet! Provided he doesn't fall too far.

Sergeant-Major "Lofty" Blomfield

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