

GORDON HUTTER: ALL-ROUND SPORTSMAN

Doyen Of New Zealand Commentators

As familiar as their own features to followers of Rugby, racing and cricket, to wrestling and boxing fans within range of 1YA, Auckland, is the voice of Gordon Hutter, doyen of New Zealand sporting announcers. He has been in radio for the past 17 years and for 13 of them he has been doing sporting broadcasts of every description, showing a versatility which few radio commentators in Australia or New Zealand could equal. He did not show any inclination to talk about himself as he talks about other sporting personalities when "The Listener" approached him for an interview, but sufficient was told to give readers some idea of the solid background of personal experience which he brings to his work.

IT was in 1923, in the old Auckland studio in Upper Symonds Street, that Gordon Hutter first faced the microphone. He wasn't a sporting commentator then, nor had he a fan-mail like a film-star. His line was reciting and doing humorous turns, believe it or not. But all the time he was developing along the lines which made him a "natural" among sports announcers.

He had started off by playing hockey, cricket and Rugby for Devonport School, then he played Soccer for North Shore and Ponsonby, and followed that up with League for the Shore Club. Living on the shores of the Waitemata it was inevitable that he should gravitate to yachting, and at one stage he sailed in the Sanders' Cup trials. An interest in swimming and life-saving was likewise inevitable. But he had other interests as well, though he did not explain how he found enough hours in the day to indulge them. He studied boxing under Vic. Cliff, then wrestling under Tennent Colledge, and went so far in the latter sport as to become a referee. At one time, too, he had a stake in the Turf and followers of form in the Auckland district will remember Seafox and Garonne which raced with success under his colours. In between times, he rowed, played tennis, and did a creditable round of golf. He was more or less the all-round sportsman.

"That's the Way We Placed 'Em"

In 1927 he made his first sporting broadcast—of a cricket match—but it is so long ago, and he has made so many in the interim that he doesn't remember very much else about it. The important thing, however, was that he had found his bent and he has since made such good use of his own experiences (the plural seems called for) in his broadcasts that loyal Aucklanders, and a good many listeners who live much farther away, vote him second to none. The Melbourne Cup, they say, would be a lot more exciting if Gordon Hutter were at the microphone to top off a breathless commentary with his inevitable "... and that's the way we placed 'em."

To the average sporting listener his merit as a commentator is that he maintains interest by being on the job all the time. He is hardly ever at a loss for a name, whether it be the name of the second five-eighth lying in the mud on the opposite side of the football field, or

the name of the surprise packet which is putting on a burst of speed into the home stretch on the race track. And his commentary does not flag, hasn't holes in it; though he can get excited and knows how to communicate that excitement to listeners, he never becomes incoherent.

Big Broadcasts

Since he took up the work in 1927 Gordon Hutter has been on the spot at practically every major sporting event in the Auckland Province. He broadcast Rugby matches, Tests, and other fixtures, in which the last visiting British team took part, and he described the last Springbok matches at Auckland. He saw the Indian hockey teams in action and the Australian and English League footballers and watched the English and Australian cricketers play against Auckland and New Zealand.

The seasonal round of racing and trotting meetings he takes in his stride, along with Cornwell Cup contests and Kirk-Windeyer golf matches. He has seen many famous flyers arrive and depart, from the days of Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith onward. He saw the triumph of Jean Batten's arrival after her epic flight from England, and the failure of "Wizard" Smith's attempt on the world's land-speed record at Ninety-mile Beach. All of these things he saw, and he told Aucklanders, and any others who happened to be listening, all about them.

Pioneer Efforts

Of course, he had his share of the trials of pioneer work. He remembers, for example, the time about 14 years ago, when radio was barred from the turf and broadcasts were relayed from outside the course, from the Caledonian grandstand or the cabs of trucks—one commentary he gave from a Chinese market gardener's cart.

The earliest work he did with portable transmitters was in broadcasting the progress of rowing regattas in Whau River and a Sanders' Cup contest on the Waitemata, and one of the Sanders' Cup races provided him with about the most dangerous job he has had to do so far. On that occasion there was almost a gale blowing, all the operators got seasick and the launch they were using was shipping it green most of the time.

Down by the Railroad Track

Another assignment in which discomfort and danger were present in about equal proportions was at Hamilton, where he had gone to broadcast a regatta on the Waikato. The unit was

certainly provided with a coign of vantage, though a precarious one. It was accommodated on a plank slung immediately underneath the track of the railway bridge, a good fifty feet above the Waikato River. That in itself was, of course, a small matter—sporting commentators are much too busy to get vertiginous—but the activities of the Railways Department rather complicated things, for every time a train passed over the bridge (and they seemed to be inordinately frequent), the plank rocked violently and showers of cinders and hot coals fell from the firebox over and around the unhappy band of radio-men.

But even with these disadvantages Gordon Hutter was inclined to vote that an easier job than doing golf commentaries. Kirk-Windeyer contests were the hardest of the lot. It took three men to carry the portable equipment and they had a long, long way to walk.

Work Behind the Scenes

The work of a sports announcer, of course, entails much more than broadcasts "from the field." If these broadcasts are to be worth anything at all the announcer has to get in a lot of heavy spade work behind the scenes, and Gordon Hutter consequently spends a lot of time at the training track and in the gym, or watching teams at practice. An aptitude for visual memory, the ability to pick out a player or a horse at a distance, or describe an intricate wrestling hold, is an initial advantage, but it has to be kept up to date. New players arrive, new horses are registered, and wrestlers spend their spare time thinking up newer and more ferocious holds with which to paralyse their opponents; and the alert announcer has to keep abreast of all these developments.

Then there are personalities to be interviewed at the microphone, and that demands a mental alertness on the part of the announcer equal to the task of drawing something interesting from people who are accustomed to act rather than speak. Here Gordon Hutter has run the whole gamut again, from international ping-pong or rather, table-tennis stars, to the cosmopolitan galaxy of the wrestling world.

No Armchair Yet

That Gordon Hutter's work to-day should be mainly watching other people exert themselves must not be taken to mean that he has reached the armchair stage. Only four years ago he was a member of the Auckland champion indoor basketball team—the first year in which this sport reached the championship stage here—and there are many who consider that, ice-hockey barred, indoor basketball can be the most exacting sport of all. A glance at the other members of the team would help to confirm this. They were Ron. Bush (former All Black), Young Gildo (the Filipino boxer), Mal. Fraser (Auckland Rugby representative), and Charlie Lyndon (gym. instructor).

Heard in Queensland

Fan-mail, queries and other correspondence reach him regularly from all over the Dominion, and the information



S. P. Andrew photograph
GORDON HUTTER

All-round sportsman—but not in the physical sense

provided in his Friday evening sports sessions has settled countless wagers and arguments. Mail also arrives for him in quantity from the Australian States, particularly from Queensland where reception of Auckland programmes seems to be unusually good, and interest in wrestling is keen.

For himself, he would not admit any preferences in his work; and granted that conditions are fair, he is as ready to describe a wrestling bout as a boat-race. Nor does he think that sport is going to suffer a setback on account of the war. On the contrary, he sees the possibility of young players getting a chance to show their worth as more seasoned sportsmen pass from the playing fields to more important spheres. He thinks that if the younger players get their chance it will mean much to sport in all its branches in New Zealand—and he won't object to swotting up the new faces and the new names.



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