

Mike-Happy Sportsmen

SOMEONE once proclaimed that of games suitable for broadcasting, bridge was possibly one; poker was certainly not. At the time I agreed; but after listening to the commentaries on the swimming events on the first night of the Empire Games, I begin to wonder if any game—even poker, even chess—is an unsuitable subject for broadcast in the mouth of the chosen mike-happy broadcaster. On Saturday night the commentators (especially the Australian one) at the Olympic Pool on that busy Newmarket corner in Auckland, gave their listeners a thorough-going water-side decimated-second thrashing-splashing account of the races. I am sure it would be possible to broadcast such events without a hint of water, cold and churned, and with scarcely a hint of cheering crowds; so that the cosy listeners in the south, close-curtained against the advancing cold front, might picture an asphalt tennis court or some such absurdity, until a chance glance at the printed programme reminded them that these were *swimming races*. No such absurdity was possible that Saturday night.

The details were multitudinous, filling in the pauses between heats: the colours of swim-suits, bathing caps, national emblems—and the positions on the swim-suits of those emblems; the habits of the contestants, two in the water “warming-up,” one still in her track-suit (“you call them sweat-suits, we call them track-suits, comes to the same thing”), another still in her dressing-gown, another taking off her shoes and socks (they all wear shoes, must keep the feet warm, no good going in the water with cold feet), the chaperones there with their charges, but the chaperones like to be called manageresses; the lights on the water, the 55 yards of milky turquoise-blue water; the competitor from Ceylon very tall, about 6ft. 2in.; the roar of applause as each competitor is introduced; and then the get on your marks, ready, the gun—and the SPLASH.

The good start, the six lanes with the names rattling out of that man's mouth as sharp as the crackle of pine cones ripening on a hot day, the one swimmer drawing half a yard, a yard ahead, the almost simultaneous touch—he couldn't pick it for the churn of the water—the leader now a yard clear, down to the twenty-five, and there's the New Zealander gaining, yes, catching South Africa, the New Zealander is leading, she's going to WIN!

It is a scream of genius with which he greets that win. How many brilliant actors can do it? One in a hundred, perhaps. But the sports commentators will scream a horse home in the cup, they will scream a rowing eight across the line, or a three-quarter to a touch-down, or a cyclist to a wheel-rim win—Saturday after Saturday they do it, pouring out words from mouths that never sound too dry or too wet, in voices that never

sound husky or hoarse—except with excitement, justified and expected excitement—and without one slip or fluff or gabble of meaningless sound.

Whether you like it or not, whether this is your particular radio food or poison, the sports broadcasts have, as the swimming commentator said of a young competitor, “come good”; the sports commentators are right at home with their medium, mike-happy and word-perfect.

—J.E.B.

Inspired Detail

THE fact that some of the best music and the pick of the BBC talks are reserved for 1YA's Sunday afternoon programme makes it perhaps the most dependable three hours' listening of the week. Recently we've been hearing repeats of the fine *In the Words of Shakespeare* series which can stand being re-played several times, and now *Chapter and Verse* is back again. In listening last Sunday to the programme on John Keats, which I missed on its first round, I was struck not only by the sincerity of the verse-reading, but by the characteristic BBC attention to detail. The selection of poems was good, and the extracts from the letters arranged so as to illuminate the poems and show the development of Keats's idea of poetry. But it was the little things which caught my attention—the economy of the introduction, the fact that, while a soprano read “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” it was a contralto who read “Ode to Autumn,” and the slight but unmistakable Cockney accent of the man who read from these letters. These are the touches which please us by their revelation of extra care, and which lift programmes above the mediocre.

Conventional Sleuth

NEARLY all the more recent fictional detectives follow the same development. In the beginning burdened with such distinguishing marks as a quaint accent, eccentric clothes and strange physical habits, the Hercule Poirots and the Ellery Queens gradually shed these Holmesian characteristics from book to book until they become as like ordinary people as it is possible for two-dimensional characters to be. So with Lord Peter Wimsey. Having followed his career roughly in chronological order, and remembering him mainly as the more or less normal person of *Gaudy Night*, I was somewhat startled to meet again the younger, more mannered Wimsey, betraying so clearly his “Raffles”-Oppenheim ancestry, in the BBC serial *Whose Body?* from 1YC. However, once one accepts the rather outmoded convention that a hyper-sensitive palate, connoisseurship and sartorial elegance are integral parts



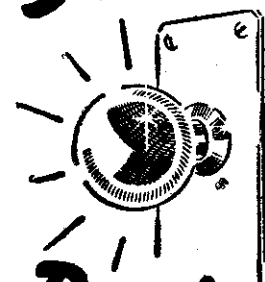
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