

SPORT

by

S. V. McEwen

THE year just closed has been a busy one for sport in New Zealand, but with one or two exceptions, there has really been nothing of an outstanding nature in the way of individual effort.

Most important of all sports activities was our participation in the Empire Games in Sydney, where the South Islanders, Matthews and Boot, won flat race titles and in doing so proved themselves in the world class.

Our swimmers were moderate, Miss Leydon being the only competitor to fill a place. Our boxers were definitely below standard; and our wrestlers laboured under the difficulty of strange rules.

The New Zealand cyclists were of fair average standard.

Later in the year the All Blacks partially reinstated themselves by defeating Australia in the test series. I cannot subscribe to the extravagant claims made on their behalf, but will be prepared to do so when they prove themselves against the South Africans in 1940.

The team which went to Australia was unquestionably a better side than that which lost the rubber to the Springboks in New Zealand in 1937, but it did not need to be a super combination to fulfil that qualification.

Rugby football in Australia is not as consistently strong as we are often led to believe. Some New Zealand teams have found it very difficult to dispose of the Australians, but the standard varies a good deal.

In my opinion the performance of outstanding merit in the realm of sport in this Dominion during 1938 was Lawn Derby's mile against time in 1min. 59.25sec., at Addington in November.

Lawn Derby is the first pacer to go a mile in better than two minutes outside the United States, the home of trotting.

Dull Cricket

THE first round of Plunket Shield cricket matches was disposed of over the Christmas week-end, and at the moment the Wellington province is firmly entrenched at the head of affairs with an innings win over Otago. Auckland, the holders of the trophy, secured a first-innings win over Canterbury, the weather being responsible for the match not being completed within the specified time.

In neither game was the cricket of a high standard. Otago fielded a team of extremely moderate class and most of them developed the "jitters" when Pritchard got to work with the ball.

Pritchard is a country player from the Manawatu

association who had the Wellington town team fairly well subdued in the annual Town v. Country match recently, and is one of the most promising trundlers of his type for some years.

Otago, however, treated the whole Wellington attack with an exaggerated respect, and their effort was far below Plunket Shield standard.

Funereal

ON Lancaster Park, Canterbury and Auckland engaged in one of those funereal affairs that is sure to drive away public support.

When provincial sides can do no better than score runs at the rate of about 30 per hour, they are unlikely to command much public support.

The Canterbury and Auckland teams included several players who toured England and Australia with the New Zealand representative team in 1937, but one would never have thought so until the last day, when Ian Cromb lifted the game from the ashes for Canterbury and defied the Auckland attack with an undefeated 126.

We can only hope that the first round of shield matches did not represent the true playing strength of New Zealand first-grade cricket. If it did, Sir Julien Cahn's team, which arrives here shortly, should go through undefeated.

Turf Fiasco

THE spice of sport is the unexpected happening. It stirs the public imagination, and it is a heaven-sent blessing to the sporting journalist who, I can

assure you, is a much harassed being in these holiday periods with so many things to keep an eye on.

New Zealand's richest racing event, the Auckland Cup, provided the year's greatest turf fiasco when a horse not bred to stay two miles was allowed to dawdle along for the first mile and then sprint home the last mile in fast time which gave the true stayers no chance.

The riders of the true stayers can be held responsible for their own failure through being too slow to sum up the situation.

Riding a horse in a long distance race is not as easy as it looks. The jockey must be a good judge of pace. If he is riding a horse who is known to be a true stayer and the early pace is slow, he must go out and force it himself, because the stayer comes into his own with a solid pace on all the way. The non-stayers, forced to go a hard pace from the outset, run themselves out, and it is then that the precious quality of stamina reaps its reward.

But if non-stayers are allowed to set their own slow pace and sprint home, the stayer cannot muster the necessary speed to foot it with them.

That was how Cheval de Volee came to win the Auckland Cup at Ellerslie on Boxing Day. All credit must be given to the horse and its rider. They did their part, and were allowed to steal the race because none of the riders on horses who have proved themselves at two miles awoke to the fact that the early pace was no good to them. The stayer-bred horses in this year's Auckland Cup had no chance after the first mile had been covered in 1min. 49sec.



CECIL MATTHEWS, outstanding track athlete in New Zealand in 1938. Matthews won the British Empire titles at three and six miles and on each occasion established a record.

An All-Rounder

MR. NORMAN INGRAM, organising secretary for the national "Learn to Swim Week," has long been an ardent supporter of life-saving. On the day he walked from Island Bay to see the wreckage of the ill-fated Penguin, Mr. Ingram decided that it was the duty of every young New Zealander to learn how to

swim. And for many years now he has been Dominion secretary of the New Zealand Surf and Life-Saving Society, and has had much to do with the increased public interest being taken in this important phase of public service.

A keen cricketer in his younger days, Mr. Ingram played in good class in Australia before returning to take up a position with the Wellington Harbour Board, where he has been prominent in social and sporting circles.

A talk on the "Learn to Swim Week" will be given by Mr. W. O. Stockley, organising secretary of the Auckland branch of the National Swimming and Life-Saving Council, from 2YA at 7.35 p.m., January 10.

Record Shaky?

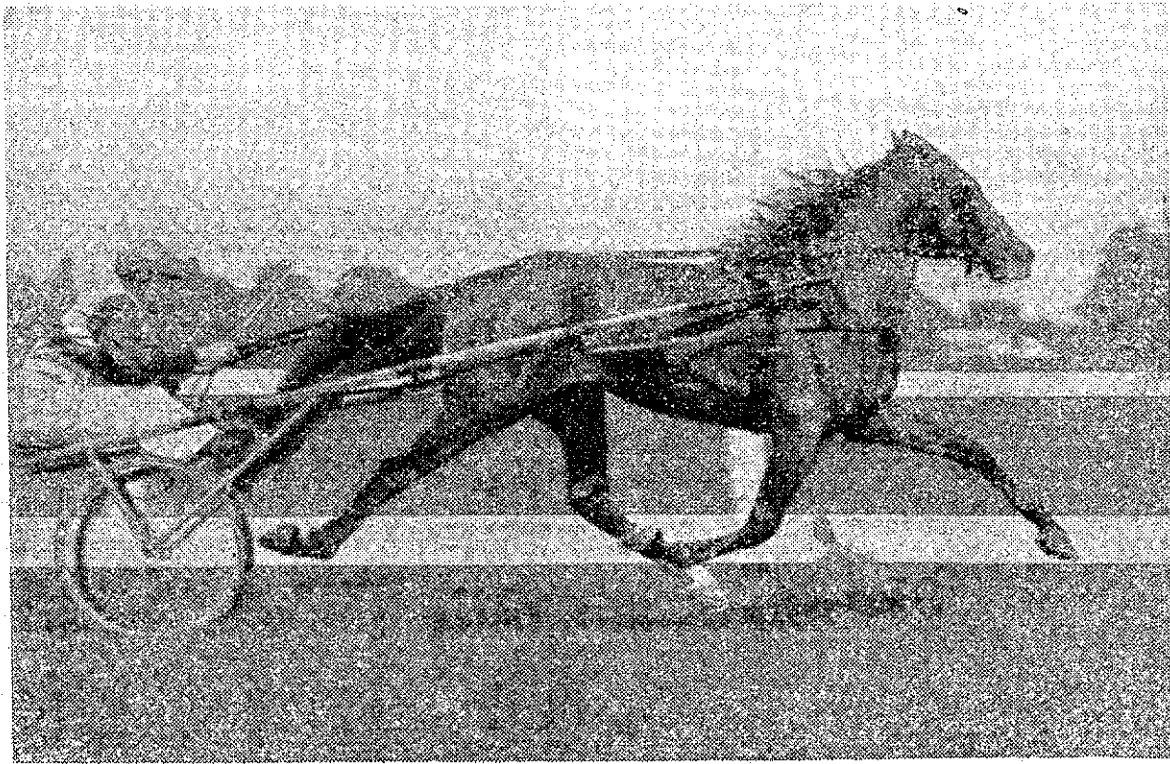
Australian track athletes, Gerald Backhouse (middle distance) and Ted Best (sprinter), have been thrilling spectators in Otago and Southland with fine exhibitions of running. Best, who filled third place in the 100 and 220 yards sprints at the Empire Games, is showing form better than that which placed him in the Australian team, and his supporters in the south are confident he will break the New Zealand record of 9.45sec. for 100 yards.

However, this record is harder to break than many people imagine. Such great sprinters as Jackson Scholz, Maurice Kirksey and George Simpson have tried to bring the mark down, but have failed. Best, running 10sec. in four consecutive races, is showing consistency and, given the right conditions when up against class opposition, may break the jinx that has existed over this record.

Backhouse, an Australian finalist in the 800 metres at the 1936 Olympic Games, holds the Australian native record for 820 yards, 800 and 1500 metres. He is of a light build, and does not follow the customary training methods. On one occasion he ran 27 miles "just for the fun of it."

Backhouse will meet stern competition in New Zealand when he meets the Dominion's milers. At Wellington, on January 7, he will face Pat Boot and Bill Pullar, both of whom have broken 4min. 15sec. for the distance, and a great race should result. At the Empire Games, Backhouse ran 4min. 12sec. to fill second place to Alford, of Wales. Boot was third and Pullar, who had not recovered from an illness, was sixth.

Of the field likely to face the starter at Wellington, Pullar holds the fastest New Zealand time, having won the New Zealand mile title in 4min. 14.45sec., in 1937.



A sporting achievement of outstanding merit in 1938 was that of the Australian-bred, owned and trained Lawn Derby, who is the first pacer outside the United States to cover a mile in less than two minutes. Driven by his veteran trainer, W. J. O'Shea, Lawn Derby paced a mile against time at Addington in November, in 1min. 59.25sec. This splendid action picture of Lawn Derby clearly reveals the enormous stride he takes and his perfect balance when travelling at a high rate of speed.