

SPORT

by

S. V. McEwen

WHEN Vernon Boot—known to the sporting world as "Pat" Boot—defeated the Australian Gerald Backhouse, and the ex-New Zealand mile champion Billy Pullar, at Wellington, he received considerable "honourable mention" through the columns of the daily Press. He deserved it; of that there is no doubt.

A week later, Gerald Backhouse turned the tables on both Boot and Pullar. What a contrast in the space devoted to the two races! One paper didn't even bother to mention, in the headings, that Backhouse had scored a wonderful win; instead, it drew attention to Ted Best's win in the sprint—and Best has won at every start in New Zealand! Had he been defeated there would have been cause for his name appearing in the headlines. Backhouse's exceptionally fine winning run was relegated to a mere news item.

ARE New Zealanders getting thin-skinned? Do they not want to have their attention drawn to the successes of an invader over their own stars? Surely not! But this glossing over of Boot's defeat—coming immediately after the hysteria of his win—is not to the credit of those who handled the publicity.

Gerald Backhouse is entitled to the fullest praise for his win over Pat Boot. His was a tactical victory, and the fact that the time was seconds slower than that returned by Boot in winning the "Mile of the Century" is not as important as many would believe.

When champion milers get together for competition it is the exception rather than the rule to see fast times recorded. The exceptional time returned by Boot has been hailed far and wide as a masterly performance. So it was—but spare a thought for the runner who made that time possible, Bill Pullar, the man who went out to the front to breast the strong wind and set the pace which was accepted by Boot and Backhouse.

The race at Dunedin, when Backhouse turned the tables, was a different story. Boot tried to run from the front—and paid the penalty. A survey of Boot's best runs shows that he has invariably produced his outstanding performances when given fast early pace; when

called on to set his own pace from the outset he has not done so well. There were several circumstances which helped to make the Dunedin race a different battle of tactics.

FIRST of all, the gallant Pullar had indulged in some record travelling in order to be present. He had left Master-ton at 9.50 on the morning of the race, arrived at Wellington at 10.40, connected with the Union Airways service, and landed at the Taiari aerodrome at 2.30 p.m. He was met by a special car which rushed him to the Caledonian sports-ground. He walked on to the ground at 3 p.m., and half-an-hour later was on the mark to compete against two of the Empire's best athletes.

He had travelled 520 miles, in a little more than five hours,

half of the last lap at an even faster rate.

Boot left his finishing run a little later on this occasion, not making a forward move until 150 yards from the tape. He then swept to the front, closely attended by Backhouse.

NOW, Boot's finish had been lauded from time to time, but close observers of his running will affirm that he does not possess a strong finish when challenged. Do not take the inference that he lacks heart—Boot is as game as they are made—but, when pressed, he has a tendency to "climb." His best runs, and best finishes, have been when he has swept past the opposition, with a surprise forward move, and then been able to run in without punishing himself.

ON this occasion, Backhouse did not allow the New

Zealander to get a break on him, and caught him in the straight to go ahead and win by five yards in 4min. 19sec. This was the second fastest mile race on the ground, Pullar having a 4min. 18sec. mile—made under perfect conditions—to his credit.

to wax sarcastic over the "funeral procession," but Cunningham realised that he had triumphed in a battle of tactics. So did Backhouse triumph in a battle of tactics at Dunedin.

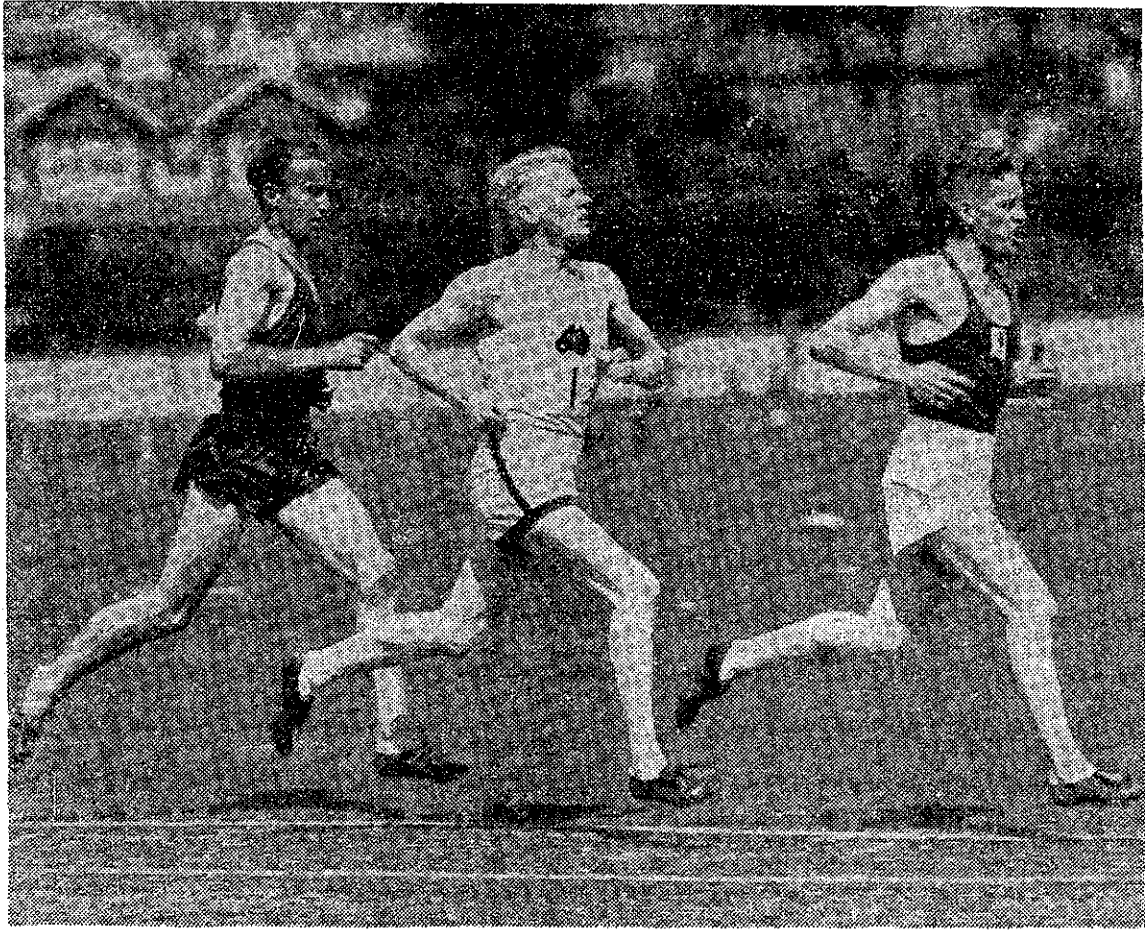
Congratulations, Backhouse! You won a grand race in a grand manner.

BOOT now leaves New Zealand to compete in Australia, where he will make an attempt on the world record of 1min. 49.1-5sec., held by Sydney Wooderson, of England. New Zealanders will wish him well. He has a task on his hands, but is capable of doing it—if given the assistance rendered Wooderson. When Wooderson made his record, he took part in a specially framed handicap event; as he caught the field he was allowed the inside running and was given

to replace a record made in actual competition.

A FEW days ago, a most interesting personality dropped into Wellington during the course of a world tour. He was Mr. H. W. Bartleet, known in England as "The Cycling Historian." Mr. Bartleet possesses what is acknowledged to be the best collection of cycling souvenirs in existence.

HIS collection has been handed over to the city of Coventry for permanent exhibition. Included in the "Bartleet Collection of Historic Cycles" are many machines of historic interest. Mr. Bartleet possessed the bicycle on which the first cyclist exceeded 20 miles in an hour—also the machine on which 60 miles was first ridden in an hour! Time marches on! Today the world



Boot's win over Pullar and Backhouse, at Wellington, sent New Zealanders into hysterics; but when Backhouse turned the tables, at Dunedin, it didn't even make the headlines! Such treatment of visiting athletes is foreign to New Zealand and should be strongly condemned. This illustration shows Pullar leading Backhouse and Boot in the "Mile of the Century" at Wellington.

to run one mile! Was it any wonder that he preferred to let somebody else do a share of the fast work?

BACKHOUSE showed in his Australian races that his trump card is a devastating finish—something he did not possess at Wellington after getting several gulps of the capital city's celebrated gales—and he decided not to go out to the front. So it was that the initial pace-making fell to Boot, with the others in close attendance. Once again a cold wind hampered the athletes.

IT was not until two laps had been covered—in 2min. 12sec.—that Pullar made a move to the front of the scratch trio. The pace immediately quickened, Pullar cutting the third lap out in 65sec., and running the first

Zealander to get a break on him, and caught him in the straight to go ahead and win by five yards in 4min. 19sec. This was the second fastest mile race on the ground, Pullar having a 4min. 18sec. mile—made under perfect conditions—to his credit.

As the time was 4 1-5sec. slower than that returned by Boot a week earlier, the merit of Backhouse's run has not been fully appreciated. It was a magnificent effort and the first man to extend congratulations was Boot—he realised the merit of the Australian's run.

READERS may be surprised to learn that Glenn Cunningham, who has covered a mile in 4min. 4sec., considers his best race to have been a title win in 4min. 27sec. When Cunningham ran this time the sporting writers were inclined

every consideration. His was not a truly run race—it was a paced effort. Boot, at the British Empire Games, ran the half-mile in 1min. 51.1-5sec.—and made the time against the Empire's best athletes. He was not given any consideration; he was just another competitor and had to run his own race, covering more than the half-mile.

UNLESS there are Australian athletes capable of pulling Boot out for 600 or 700 yards he will find his attempt doubly hard. I have already mentioned that Boot is at his best when given fast early pace and allowed to shoot out about a furlong from home to give a sustained finishing burst. That will be the only way he will be able to get near the world record—a world record that should not have been allowed

record is in excess of 76 miles in an hour, but an analysis of the 29 mile one-hour ride shows that Cortis, who made that record in 1882, pedalled almost as fast as Vanderstuyft did when making the present record. It was merely a matter of better equipment and understanding of gear ratios that made the difference.

PERHAPS the most interesting souvenir is the bicycle ridden by Willie Hume, at Belfast in 1889. This is the first vehicle to be fitted with pneumatic tyres—and was fitted by the inventor, J. B. Dunlop, himself! In these days of mechanised transport—dependent on pneumatic tyres for comfort—it is interesting to know that the first pneumatically-fitted vehicle is in a good state of preservation. The original tyres, stuck on by Dunlop, are there today and a signed letter from Mr. Dunlop guarantees the authenticity of the machine and tyres.

Mr. Bartleet, who was born at Glenelg, South Australia, was a journalist for more than 50 years.