The Wonder "Kids" Who Rule Present-Day Athletics

A Survey of the World Championships Now Held by Boys and Girls Still in Their Teens

BY J. C. KOFOED.

A BROMIDE is oftentimes a truth that is talked about so much that it has become trite.

"Youth must be served" is about as bromidic a phrase as the writer can dig out of his vocabulary, yet within the last few years it has superseded all others in the phraseology of sportdom.

And the reason?

Because in the last few years bounding, surging youth has pressed more to the fore than ever; not youth as we looked on it a few years back—the champions of 25 and 26—but youngsters on the glorious side of 21.

They crowd up toward fame, blotting out the deeds of the older masters by flaming deeds that bring gasps of admiration. Every day these striplings are breaking records that another generation gazed upon with awe.

In the water, on the links, the diamond, the tennis court the track, the prize ring—they swarm everywhere. Their name is Legion, and their middle name is Darn Good!

When it comes to swimming there never has been any one so fast as Johnny Weismuller. He has smashed nearly every record that can be broken. It was not so long ago that Duke Kahanamoku was regarded as the acme of perfection—a sort of human fish. Yet Weismuller broke the Hawaiian's records one after the other with consummate ease. And Johnny is just 19 years old.

"He is the greatest swimmer that ever lived," said the duke. "I have never seen his equal, and I never expect to see it. Folks used to think I was pretty fast—" and his swarthy face lit with a smile—"but I am an old, spavined ice-wagon horse compared with him."

Gertrude Ederle is the newest of the women swimming sensations. She is the Johnny Weismuller of her sex and her speed is almost uncanny. And Young Miss Gertrude has yet to see her 20th summer. Then next in line comes Helen Wainwright, champion fancy woman diver. Yet Helen is "woman" by courtesy only, since she was barely 14 when she went to Brussels to compete in the Olympic games.

Fourteen, and an international star! There is youth with a vengeance. When adolescence can step into the arena and defeat maturity it is time to admit that youth is being served a larger portion of success than it ever had.

Yet 14 is not the dead line for athletic success. Georges Carpentier in his grimy little coal-mining home at Lens was only 13 when he went forth with Francois Deschamps to fight his first battles in the ring and become the greatest fighter ever developed in the land of the Gauls.

Other great fistmen have started at the tender years when most boys are in high school. That caveman, Sam Langford, was 16 when he won his first fame; so was little Johnny Coulon, one of the greatest bantamweights that ever lived. And Ted (Kid) Lewis had just reached his 14th birthday when he sank his first blows into an opponent's midriff.

Switch to the tennis courts, and still you find youth triumphant. There Vincent Richards, who, at 19 is one of the highest ranking players in the land, is a most interesting figure. At 15 he was a national champion. Still in his teens he crowded that splendid veteran, Watson Washburn, off the Davis cup team, and became an internationalist.

Paired in the doubles, with Bill Tilden, against Pat O'Hara Wood and Gerald Patterson, he showed to far greater advantage than the world's champion. His volleying was only surpassed by Wood. At the net he met the brunt of the Anzac attack, getting his racquet on the ball at times when it seemed utterly impossible.

Physically he looks to be anything but the super-athlete. He is thin, almost frail, a flaxen-haired youngster, rather stooped in the shoulders, with an air of laziness that is absent when he is on the court. He was 12 years old when he took up tennis, 13 when he won his first tournament. At 15 he was the national junior champion, and at 19 a Davis cup internationalist.

In France Henri Cochet, still on this side of 21, has been a star at the net for some years, and is one of the backbones of the French Davis cup team.

On the golf links—in spite of the fact that the braw and bonnie game has been dubbed an old man's relaxation—the preponderance is still more strongly in favor of youth.

All three of our champions are still kids in the eyes of the middle-aged. Winsome little Glenna Collett, with her pretty face and dancing eyes and mannish driving power, came to a championship through a field that contained women two and three times her age—women who were veterans of tournaments played before Glenna was born.

Opposed to her, among the others, were Mrs. Dorothy Campbell Hurd, Mrs. Ronald Barlow, seven times eastern champion; Mrs. Caleb Fox, dean of all women golfers, who qualified in national tournaments eight years before slender Glenna saw the light of day—a score of other veterans far her senior in age and experience.

Yet she won the highest honors in woman's golf, just as Jesse Sweetser, at 20, captured the title of amateur champion of the United States. Sweetser is a student at Yale, yet he achieved a feat at the Country club of Brookline that has no equal in the annals of golf in this country.

He defeated Bobby Jones in the semi-final and Chick Evans in the final round of the tournament at Brookline, after having worked his way through the field by a magnificent display of golf.

Jesse started playing when he was 11 years old, and at the age of 14 was shooting consistently in the low 70s around the Normandie course. He was just 12 when Chick Evans came to St. Louis, and it was from that master of golfing style that the new champion got his first lesson in mashie play.

"I copied him as much as I could, and I haven't changed very much since then. Later I learned a thing or two from Bobby Jones." And it was on the prostrate forms of Evans and Jones that Jesse Sweetser stepped to the highest honors in amateur golf.

Jones, himself, by the way, is only 20 and a freshman at Harvard, but he is conceded by every professional who has ever seen him play to be the finest stylist in the whole realm of the game. True, he was beaten by Sweetser in the national championship, but he is not a whit inferior to that star.

Then add to the triumvirate of champions the name of Gene Sarazen. Here we have a cocky little youngster, as courageous and able a player as ever won an open championship. He learned his game as a caddy, not having the advantage of wealthy parents like Sweetser and Miss Collett. His first strokes were taken with home-made clubs. But he studied and practiced continually, and this year has been a continuous succession of triumphs.

He won the open, the southern and professional golfers' championships. He defeated Walter Hagen in a 72-hole match for the championship of the world while suffering from an attack of appendicitis.

Baseball, now. It seems that the veterans are the outstanding lights of the game, but the most promising pitcher is Benson Brilliheart of Washington, a school-boy of 18, who is already matching his strength and skill with that of the greatest players on the diamond. And you might remember that Ty Cobb—the greatest ball player that ever lived—was only 16 years of age when he started on his professional career, and was less than 19 when he entered the big leagues.

You may also recall that Waite Hoyt, hero of the world series of 1921, came to fast company when he was a shade under 17, and was hailed everywhere as the schoolboy wizard. As fast as an old-timer steps off into the shade with his battered old glove in his hand, some fresh-faced youngster, bubbling with vitality and confidence, comes charging out into the sunlight to take his place.

What is it that makes those youngsters champions at such tender years?

Weismuller and Sweetser are physically powerful, but it isn't strength. Glenna Collett isn't nearly so big and strong as some of the women she defeated, and Vinnie Richards is frail.

It is rather a superabundance of youth; the terrific concentration of effort—of sustained effort—that youth alone is capable of.

England presents an exception to the rule of youth, probably because the mother of nations has slipped so woefully in athletics. Wethered, the amateur golf champion, is a young man, but some years the senior of Sweetser. George Duncan, the best of the younger professionals, is no child in years. Polo is still carried on by such veterans as Major Lockett, and England cannot match a Hitchcock or a Strawbridge or Sanford, such as we can show among our very young pololsts.

But youth in England will undoubtedly take a hand very soon, as it has done in other lands. The love of athletic sport is too deeply rooted there to stay permanently in the mire of defeat. And when the renaissance comes there look to see it led and fostered by the "children," the super-stars of 17, 18 and 20.

The dominance of youth has not been confined exclusively to the realm of muscle. Literature has received a very definite impetus from those seekers for truth and beauty who are still on the sunny side of 21.

The youngest of them is Hilda Conkling, who at 15 has gained a foothold on the ladder of fame and publicity. Her mother was a poetess of note, and Hilda had the advantage of heredity and environment to enable her to come so quickly to the fore. Her book of verse created something of a furore.

It was Hilda who inspired the comment of that keen satirist, Dorothy Parker, that "it won't be long before contributors visit the editorial offices on kiddie cars."

Perhaps so, and yet these youngsters are bringing into literature the same nerve and spirit that the newer breed of champions has given to sports.

The best known of the younger writers is F. Scott Fitzgerald, the historian of the flapper and the equal of Booth Tarkington in recording the soul stirrings and conversations of the younger generation.

Fitzgerald, the debonair and self-confident young graduate of Princeton, was already becoming known to the public before he left the Jersey university's classic campus. He has shown a magnificent sense of phrasing, a cleverness of plot, a phonographic ability to record the talk of those about him.

At an age when most young men are groping about to establish themselves, Fitzgerald has already slipped deeply of the cup of success. He is famous, wealthy, married to the girl of his heart. What more could any man ask of the gods?

Among the younger women writers Dorothy Speare can be rated perhaps with Scott Fitzgerald. She at least writes of the same sort of people who intrigue him. It is true that she lacks much of Fitzgerald's vision and technique, but she has earned her spurs at an age when femininity's thoughts are usually centered on frocks and dances and bonbons.

Then there is the prodigy, Harry Hervey, whose "Caravans of the Night" was executed with such a sense of warm color and enthusiasm and with such a deftness at handling plot and counterplot that he won a most cordial welcome from the critics.

The list of youthful novelists is tremendous, without going back into babyhood to reach out for Daisy Ashford and those other children who may or may not have written the things credited to them.

In the field of criticism we can pick out John V. A. Weaver, who when still in his teens showed an excellent critical judgment and a caustic pen. Weaver is still a boy in years, but he is known throughout the land, and his book, "In American," at least aroused a mortal combat between other critics.

Weaver married Peggy Wood, the 19-year-old star of "Marjolaine," and thus united the youthful renaissance of literature and the stage. Of course, a paucity of years has never been a handicap in the realm of footlight and grease paint.

Peggy at 19 and John at 21 have each achieved success in their chosen fields. Their combined ages is just 40, yet how many men or women of those years have done as much in their span as these two youngsters have already accomplished?

Among the editors, John Farrar, of the Bookman, is perhaps best known of those at the tender age. Farrar went into editorial work in his teens, and his good judgment and writing ability have made his magazine a bigger power than it ever was. He is just a touch more than 21 now.

And then we must mention Stephen Vincent Benet, for no story of the achievements of the rebellious youth of the period—youth breaking the shackles of age-old conventions—can be told without mention of him.

Now we come to the end of our story This is the age of youth. It shows its heels to maturity in every race. In every phase of athletics, in literature, art, on the stage, the boys and girls are pressing forward.

In Almost Every Line of Endeavor the Verve and Dash of Youth Lift Their Possessor Over the Heads of Competitors and Send Him Under the Wire a Flushed Victor

The Juvenile Columbuses Put Off From Shore, With Hopes Undashed by the Bitter Experiences Mature Years Know, and Their Very Ignorance of Perils Seems to Insure Them Against Disaster