



**T**HIS WEEK approximately 500,000 people attending prize fights, football games, hockey, and other sports events across the country will be shown courteously and efficiently to their seats by Andy Frain ushers, a semimilitary corps of 7,000 young men who handle between 70 and 80 events a day in 22 cities from coast to coast.

Andrew T. Frain, a husky, pug-nosed Irishman with a faint brogue, is founder, sole owner, and chief executive of Andy Frain, Crowd Engineers. He has turned the handling of large crowds of people into a science. He has been facetiously called "Head of the House of Ushers." Yet there is little doubt that Frain can truthfully be called "King of the Ushers."

Whenever 200 or more people are gathered together in one spot, Frain senses a potential client. He handles dog shows, flower shows, theater waiting lines, department-store sales, fashionable weddings, even funerals, where his men serve as pallbearers—and scrupulously violate the boss's order to smile at all times.

The world's No. 1 usher was born in a crowd. As the 16th member of a family of 17 children, he was trained early in bringing order out of chaos. "We slept in shifts," Frain recalls. "The first one up was the best dressed."

**T**HE ELDER FRAIN'S income as a hod carrier was scarcely adequate, so most of the boys pitched in to help at early ages. Andy landed his first ushering job at 13. Since ushering meant free entrance to sports events, remuneration was nominal—averaging a dollar an event. But Andy was quick to observe that most ushers lacked ethics. It was standard practice then to pad your salary by letting in patrons at bargain prices.

The idea of an elite, efficient ushering corps was born in Frain's mind on May 29, 1923, when Benny Leonard fought Pinky Mitchell in Chicago's old Dexter Pavilion. A riotous crowd of 12,000 jammed the entrances just before the fighters entered the ring. Three thousand of them were without tickets. Before the evening was over, a major riot ensued and the National Guard had to be called out.

The first thing Frain did was to design a gold-epauleted uniform with white gloves. He then approached Maj. Fred McLaughlin, owner of the Chicago Black Hawks hockey team. Impressed

# King OF THE Ushers

*From funerals to  
football—anything  
that draws spectators  
is likely to be handled  
by this "Crowd Engineer"*

**By WILLIAM HEALY**

with Frain's ideas, he took a chance and signed him to usher his events at the Chicago Stadium. Frain has been there ever since. Next came William Wrigley, chewing-gum tycoon and owner of the Chicago Cubs. After watching Frain and his men operate at Wrigley Field, Wrigley advanced him \$7,000 for additional uniforms.

Frain's next target was Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby. He decided on a bold approach: he shinned over a wall, surrendered himself as a gate crasher, and demanded to be taken to Col. Matt Winn, owner of the track. Before Winn had a chance to berate the brash young man, Frain had given him a verbal blueprint of Churchill Downs' poor crowd-handling facilities and its vulnerability to gate crashing. Winn was convinced. Today Frain has 3,000 picked ushers to see that the annual crowd of 125,000 attending the Kentucky Derby is handled smoothly.

Frain ushers are mostly from the ranks of high-school and college students. All stand six feet and over. Working part-time, most of them earn from \$600 to \$1,000 toward their tuition.

Out of a Frain alumni of 25,000 can be found

doctors, lawyers, clergymen, scientists, and many men in public life. Frain is fond of dispensing moral counsel to his charges. Once he discovered that some younger ushers were spending their salaries on girl skaters in an ice show, Frain withheld their pay until the show closed.

In planning for a big event such as a national political convention or a World's Series, Frain maps his strategy much in the manner of a field general deploying his troops before battle. He spreads out a blueprint of the arena and goes over it inch by inch with his lieutenants. He wanders over the empty auditorium or stadium, making careful estimates of the number of people he thinks will pass a given spot at a given time. His guesses are rarely off by more than 50 persons in an hour's time.

Crowd behavior, however, is less predictable than crowd flow, and this is Andy Frain's No. 1 headache. He regards football, boxing, wrestling, and roller-derby fans as the most pugnacious; baseball fans the best behaved; and hockey fans the most restive. "They are always throwing something out on the ice," says Frain fretfully.

**F**RAIN RESERVES his personal animosity for gate crashers. Though their tactics are frequently ingenious, Frain is on to them. Props such as workmen's ladders, buckets of ice, and press passes are employed to get past unwary gatekeepers. Once, at a prize fight, a man brandishing an alarm clock tried unsuccessfully to bluff his way past a Frain usher by claiming he was the timekeeper. Others have used the more direct approach of trying to bribe Frain ushers. At one Kentucky Derby, a Frain usher was offered \$150 to let a man "borrow" his uniform. The offer was declined. The Chicago manufacturer who makes Frain uniforms will not sell them to anyone without Andy Frain's okay.

At 59, Frain could well afford to turn his empire over to Andy, Jr., and let him carry on the Frain tradition of handling crowd situations from the cradle to the grave (a Frain usher once delivered a baby at a ball park). But he sees no reason to retire.

When he does hang up his spurs, it will be at his lavishly appointed house in Sauganash, a fashionable Chicago suburb. The house has eight bathrooms. This would seem to be ample for Frain, a widower, and his five sons. But he isn't taking any chances.

"I swore when I was a little guy that when I grew up and had my own home, no one would have to wait in line to use the bathroom," he says.