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THE FOUR-FORTY AN EPIC OF COLLEGE LIFE

Courage and Ability Aided Ed Thorne of Morgan; but Only the Faith of a Maid Nerved Him to the Final Effort, that Meant Victory for His Hard-Pressed Team Mates.

By BENTON GIBBS

It was early in March, that the first call went out for candidates for the light yellow and blue. The great Captain Jones, anchor man of the victorious team of '26 had been lost by graduation. The prospect of victory on the Hill seemed slim indeed, especially as Randall, best of the remaining trio of quarter milers, was slowly recovering from a strained tendon. Morgan's chances on the cinders seemed doomed to failure this year.

The old team answered the call to a man. The same team which gained a hard pressed victory over Union the preceding year. With the regulars, a goodly smattering of freshmen and indifferent sophomores, had answered the call. Of the latter, Thorne appeared by far the best. Most men remembered his brilliant showing as a freshman and the predicted stardom for which he was slated. Tall, muscular and rangy, he had consistently done fifty-three, until in that memorable try for the great relays, when Randall had run him into the ground. It was whispered, that in the struggle for placement, the gruelling pace set by Jones had broken his heart. When the team finally journeyed to Penn. Jones, Randall, Georges, and Williams had sported the colors of Morgan.

Douglass High

Jeffries, the most promising of the present freshmen, had come highly lauded from Douglass High. In his scholastic meets, he ran in collegiate time and it was expected that he would make the fourth member of the quartet, upon whose performance the hope of Morgan rested.

Speculation ran rife as to whether the once promising Thorne could make the team. The majority favored Jeffries, the flashing freshman—and good reason, for that worthy was consistently hammering out the quarter in practice below fifty-three, which was as good a record as Thorne had ever made. Young, robust and full of courage, he bid fair to fill the great gap left by the mighty Jones.

Ed Thorne felt keenly the whispered comment of his team mates and especially the open opposition of the student body. The criticism heaped upon him he viewed as unjust. In last year's trials, he had matched strides with fleet Jones. Through no fault of his, he had stumbled while within the very shadow of victory, faltered and dangerously off balance, lumbered home in the rear of that bunched field. Catcalls and hoots had greeted his performance. Most of the spectators on the sidelines termed him yellow. His more considerate team mates had said that he was soft. Some even inferred that he lacked heart.

Disgusted, Thorne would have terminated his track career forever, had it not been for the solicitous interest of little Lulu Benson, who had expressed unbounded faith in him and coaxed him into donning the yellow and blue once more, in an effort to regain lost prestige.

Ed had remonstrated at first, but Lulu would have nothing of it.

"You have got to run, Eddie Thorne!" she cried angrily, stamping her foot. "You have got to show them, that no man can wear the colors of Morgan with any more courage than you. You simply have to do it, Ed."

As she made this last appeal, she thrust her arm into the crook of

his elbow and looked into his eyes so trustingly that Ed Thorne decided that he could not disappoint so sincere a friend, who had expressed such unflinching faith in him, in spite of the general cold reception which he had received since last spring.

His answer to Lulu was a solemn promise, that he would make the team. He was determined to show them that he was not yellow. He would contest every inch of that cindered track to the end, ere a team mate should lead him to the tape.

Lulu smiled happily, going every day with the crowd to see the team round itself into shape. She experienced a thrill of joy on each occasion that Ed Thorne's rangy form jogged by where she sat. Her happiness would have been complete had it not been for his averted face. Sensitive to a fault, he had heard with heavy heart the mocking criticism of those inconsiderate sideliners, who had adjudged him a quitter.

As the season progressed, the young freshman, Jeffries, improved wonderfully. He was ambitious to become the fourth member of the team. He knew that Randall, Georges and Williams would undoubtedly hold their former positions. His only chance would be to defeat Thorne for the berth vacated by Jones, and he was determined to do it.

Mindful of this condition, Jeffries had frequently attempted to draw out Ed Thorne in practice sprints. He had noted carefully the athletic figure, with loose loping stride. A unique track physique, depending only on the fighting spirit to drive it on to victory. Jeffries longed to test the heart pounding beneath that breast. But Ed Thorne consistently denied him this opportunity.

Exasperated, Jeffries had at last invited and finally challenged Thorne to a trial heat. This the latter refused, to the disgust of the team, which hoped to see these two aspirants for the coveted position pitted against each other.

As the day of the trials approached, Ed Thorne became almost an ostracized figure. The sympathy of the team to a man had been turned towards Jeffries, whose brilliant and spectacular sprints had brought him the admiration of practically the entire student body. He had become a hero, who had miraculously appeared to fill the breach in Morgan's defense.

The Saturday afternoon of the trials arrived. The entire Morgan team, in their cherished yellow and blue limbered up on the old field. Among the hundreds of spectators from every walk of college life, the results of these trials were like an open book. The '27 team was intact almost to a man. There could be no doubt as to the placers in the various classes. Only the fate of the mile relay team was in question, and few failed to express their opinion, that the freshman, Jeffries, would win the coveted berth.

The various trials were run with expected results. Coach Drew, sensing the hidden drama beneath the studied indifference of his four-forty aspirants, had regulated this event for the final trial. The immense crowd tensed as time was called, and amid a heavy silence, the competitors trotted out for the heat.

It was Randall, Georges and Williams, in that order. Then Thorne made his appearance. His advent was greeted by many snickers from the assembled co-eds and a few of the

men went so far as to hoot derisively at him.

With studied indifference, Ed jogged up to the regulars, attempting some slight pleasantry; but these worthies seemed not in the humor for joking, so pre-occupied they appeared with the business before them.

Around the first turn of the great oval, Lulu's voice reached him. Slacking his trot, he turned towards her greatly relieved that in this huge crowd, one person at least had faith in him.

"Ed!" she cried, "I don't care what any one says about you. I know that you will win. Make the team and show them!"

As she spoke, she pressed his bare forearm, sending a thrill of joy through his body. Lulu believed in him. He must make the team if it was his last act on earth.

"Thanks, Lulu! I hope so," he said simply, as he turned away and jogged along with the others, determined that he would not fail her.

A shout arose from the stands, to trail off into a deep roar. Jeffries had dashed out upon the field to be acclaimed by worshipping collegians, in whose hearts the hope of a winning team centered.

The roar had died down and Coach Drew was calling the start. They lined up—Randall, Georges, Williams, Jeffries and Thorne, Jeffries having secured the nod over Thorne.

Expectantly, the crowd waited. "Get set!" The tense forms of the crouching athletes strained; as the sharp crack of the starter's gun broke suddenly on the still air, to hurl a bunched mass of yellow trimmed, blue regalia down the track, arms flailing out to the chopping drive of churning legs. A roar went up from the cheering crowds: "Randall! Randall!"

Randall, with the flashing start which had characterized his performance for the past three years, had taken the van. Georges and Williams, old campaigners that they were, jockeyed each other for position, with Jeffries and Thorne trailing on behind. In all probability, the race was over. The men would

keep their present positions around the two turns, flashing along that barrowing, straight stretch, to the finish.

But the regulars had to reckon with a determined Ed Thorne and especially the trying Jeffries. At the first turn, Randall held the pole, probably two yards in advance of his field. Georges and Williams, now fighting desperately for second place, swung wide at the turn, in that first hundred yards of strife, leaving an opening through which Jeffries forged with amazing speed.

As the group thundered up the back stretch, it was Randall and Jeffries, with Williams, Georges and Thorne matching strides for third place.

Half way up the stretch, the long, loping gait of Thorne forced him abreast of Jeffries, then out and up to Randall. The shrieking sidelines, for one tense moment, lost their voices at the evident upset unfolding before them. Randall and Thorne took the turn as one man, the former driving out slightly, in his effort to fight off the latter's challenge.

They were both carried wide into the home stretch. Jeffries, by a super effort, drew abreast. As Randall straightened out, his high flung spikes buried themselves in Ed Thorne's foot, penetrating the soft leather, and for a fraction of a second, pinned that member to the ground. Thorne lurched uncertainly, lost his stride and in that brief instant, the race on which he had set his heart was irretrievably lost.

Coach Drew, from his position beside the last field judge, had noted the accident. He had viewed the entire race, thrilling to the remarkable challenge of Thorne, from his unfavorable position. He felt that Thorne's free stride would, without doubt, have netted him a well earned victory.

The bulk of the spectators, in their excitement, had failed to notice this interference. They attributed the final break to another case of heart. With a roar, they cheered Jeffries, now vying with Randall for first place.

Down the home stretch, they thundered to the finish. Randall, true to the tradition which for three successive seasons had placed him at start for the mile relay, would not be denied. Ahead he forged, boring to the front.

Williams and Georges, old, seasoned runners, moved gradually up on Jeffries, testing to the limit, the mettle of the freshman. The field locked in a killing struggle down the stretch, Ed Thorne driving hopelessly in the rear.

With a blinding thrust, Randall broke the tape. Jeffries, Georges and Williams, hardly a stride behind, flashed by after him.

Thorne, out of the race at the ninety marker, had, unnoticed by the madly cheering crowd, clawed his way to the very heels of the field. Randall had broken the tape for that group, even as Thorne, like a raging fury, hurtled forward and over in a desperate lunge for position. By a fraction, he had missed placement with that tied trio for second place.

Unsteady, from that last herculean effort, Thorne sprawled headlong in the dust. Faintly, he heard the muffled titter of bystanders and the still harsher catcalls of the students. A feeling of resentment swept over him, as he painfully regained his feet.

He turned angrily upon the throng, but ere he could voice his indignation, Lulu had stepped up and taken his arm.

"Now, Ed, don't be cross! I know that you did your best. I don't care even if you didn't win."

"Oh, Lulu!" he exclaimed, "you are a little brick having so much confidence in me."

They walked together toward the lockers. Thorne wished above all things to explain the reason for his faltering in the stretch, but somehow he could not bring himself to offer an excuse for his failure.

As he was bidding Lulu goodbye, Coach Drew hailed him. Coming up to them, he patted Thorne on the back encouragingly.

"That was a great race, Thorne!" he beamed. "I like, especially, your drive at the finish. A few more yards



With a desperate lunge the Morgan athlete hurled himself over the line ahead of the Union runner.