

# Against all Comers

By Dick Russell



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

“WHERE’S Smithy?”

There was a note of concern in Harry Wharton’s voice as he asked the question.

The Famous Five were gathered together in the Close with their bikes.

It was a half-holiday, and the weather was too cool for cricket and too warm for footer.

A cycle-spin had been agreed upon; and to this end Harry Wharton and Co. sought Vernon Smith’s company.

Time was when none of us would have cared to ask Vernon-Smith to take part in an excursion of any sort. But since the days when he sowed his wild oats Smithy has changed considerably for the better. He was not exactly a close chum of Wharton’s, but the captain of the Remove felt that he would be a useful companion for the afternoon’s outing.

But on this occasion, just when he was most in demand, Smithy was missing.

The Famous Five mounted guard over their bikes with an air of impatience.

“Wonder where the silly duffer’s hidden himself?” said Bob Cherry.

“Here comes Bunter,” said Nugent. “Per-

## A Complete Story.

haps he can tell us. He knows all the latest movements of the nobility and gentry.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Billy Bunter rolled up, bubbling with excitement. He intercepted the question that Harry Wharton and Co. were about to ask him.

“You’re waiting for Smithy?”

“Yes!” grunted Johnny Bull.

“Then you’ll have to wait a jolly long time. Smithy’s miles away.”

“What?”

“It’s a fact. I was outside his study just after dinner, and I happened to hear him talking to Tom Redwing—”

“You happen to hear a good many things that don’t concern you,” said Wharton contemptuously. “I only wish I’d caught you with your ear glued to the keyhole. I’d have rolled you along the passage and down the stairs, like the barrel you are!”

“Oh, really, you know! I couldn’t help hearing what they were saying. Smithy’s got such a penetrating voice, you see. I heard him suggest to Redwing that the pair of them went over to Wapshot this afternoon, to run in the Marathon Race.”

“My hat!”

The Famous Five were astonished.

They knew Vernon-Smith for an adventurous sort of chap, rather inclined to recklessness, but his latest enterprise fairly took their breath away.

“He’s potty!” said Bob Cherry. “Why, the Marathon Race is open to all the crack runners in the county. What chance has a school kid got, I should like to know? Even Wingate of the Sixth wouldn’t stand an earthly.”

“It’s just the sort of thing Smithy would do,” said Wharton thoughtfully. “And Tom

Redwing, too. Those two are never happy unless they're up against long odds."

"Is it too late to stop them?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Billy Bunter. "The race was due to start at two o'clock, and it's past that already."

Harry Wharton glanced at his watch.

"The race finishes at Courtfield," he said. "If we buzz over on our bikes, we shall be in time to see the finish."

"Good!"

"I—I say," said Bunter. "Before you ran away what about giving me a—a little tip, you know? I gave you the information about Smithy, and it's up to you to do the decent thing."

Bob Cherry spun round upon the fat junior.

"You really think you're entitled to a tip?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"Well, here goes!"

And before Bunter could faintly realise how it all happened, he found himself lying on his back in the Close.

"There's your little tip," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Owl of the Remove sat up, breathing threatenings and slaughter against the Famous Five.

But those cheerful youths were already cycling at top speed out of the gates; and Billy Bunter's outpourings were wasted on the desert air.

Courtfield, usually a sleepy, old-world place, was stirred to excitement as Harry Wharton and Co. rode through the straggling High Street.

The pavements were thronged with people, all waiting to see the finish of the Marathon Race.

There had been other sports earlier in the day; but the Marathon Race put everything else in the shade. It was far and away the biggest event of all. And the entrance to the recreation-ground, where the race would actually finish, was besieged with people. They were all intently scanning the distant stretch of roadway.

"No one in sight yet," said Johnny Ball.

"We'll make ourselves comfy here, and carry that precious pair of idiots back to Greyfriars when they turn up. They'll both be fagged out, I reckon."

"And they'll come in last if they come in at all," said Harry Wharton.

But that was where Harry, for all his customary shrewdness, made a mistake.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

IT was to Tom Redwing that Smithy first confided his idea.

Although he had not been a great while at Greyfriars, Tom Redwing had won for himself a very creditable position in the ranks of the Remove, and he was seldom in the background when there was anything doing.

"I wish to bring two facts plainly before your notice," said Smithy. "Firstly, there's a Marathon Race being run this afternoon; and secondly, I'm going to be the winner of that race."

"But, my dear ass," protested Tom Redwing, "it's an open event. There will be champions competing from all over the county. You will absolutely get left!"

"I'm pretty swift on my pins."

"Yes, I know. I'd back you against anybody in the Remove—or in the Upper Fourth, come to that. But there's a big gulf between schoolboys and crack runners. Look here, Smithy. Don't fool away a perfectly good half-holiday on that stunt. Why, we could go and enjoy ourselves——"

"And so we will, my son! We'll have the time of our little lives!"

"But where do I come in?"

"You'll make the pace for me. I've sized you up, and I know what a topping runner you are. With you and me in partnership we shall be a match for all comers."

"You—you're not joking?" stammered Redwing.

"I was never more serious in my life."

"Then it's a go!" said Tom.

He admired Smithy for his venturesome spirit, and determined to back him up loyally in this undertaking; though he was very dubious as to the result.

The two juniors changed into their

running togs, and proceeded by train to Wapshot.

On their arrival, they told the officials governing the sports that they were anxious to enter for the Marathon—a statement which evoked roars of laughter.

“Hadn’t you better go away and grow up first?” suggested one of the men. “The race is for adults—not children.”

Smithy’s lips set in a firm line.

“Never mind that just now,” he said. “If I come in last, I shall deserve all the uncomplimentary remarks you care to fling at me. Meanwhile, kindly shove down our names—Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. Thanks!”

It transpired that there were forty runners altogether.

About half of these were country yokels; and Smithy, as his keen eye swept over their clumsy figures, knew he had no-

thing to fear from them. But there were other runners—men whose names were not unknown to the sporting press—men who had done a great deal of hard running in their time, and were ready to do a good deal more.

Sharp at two o’clock the runners got off the mark.

Tom Redwing went ahead at a rattling pace. He meant to play his part to the very

best of his ability. He would run until he dropped.

As he raced along through the country lanes, past wood and copse, green meadow and sunny orchard, Tom Redwing glanced from time to time at the fellow who ran side by side with him, and noted with admiration how fit and confident Vernon-Smith appeared, and the ease and length of his stride. Redwing knew him for a good runner; but even he had underestimated his chum’s capabilities.

The country yokels were out of the picture at an early stage of the race. Most of them had failed to realise that a Marathon Race is not a joke, but calls for pluck and endurance, and iron resolution.

“How do you feel, old man?” panted Tom Redwing, after two villages had been left behind.

“Fit as a fiddle!” re-

sponded Smithy. “Do you think we can pass that tall beggar in front?”

“I’ve not the slightest doubt of it, if we hustle.”

“Right!”

Tom Redwing set a strenuous pace, and shortly after their brief conversation the two juniors were leading, save for a small, wiry man who seemed to skim over the ground like a swallow.



Smithy paused when he came to the fallen runner. “Rough luck!” he jerked out sympathetically. Newman looked up with a faint smile.

This wiry gentleman, had the juniors but known it, was a man who had made running his profession. Harry Newman was his name; and as a long-distance runner he could hold his own against any man in the county.

What chance, then, was there for Vernon-Smith, a mere schoolboy, and a junior at that?

But these thoughts did not trouble the two juniors.

They sped on in the wake of the wiry man; but though they ran with all the strength that was in them, they could not gain an inch. Newman was still skimming over the ground at top speed.

And then, a mile from home, Tom Redwing collapsed.

His hand went to his head, and he rolled over in the long grass by the roadside.

"I'm done!" he muttered.

But he had played his part well. He was not out for honour and glory. It had been his simple duty to set the pace for Smithy; and he had done so, with courage and fortitude which had never wavered.

"You've got all your work cut out!" he said to Smithy. "Don't stop for me. Go right ahead—and jolly good luck to you!"

A curious lump rose in Smithy's throat as he went ahead with his swinging stride. He was touched by his chum's loyalty. Tom

Redwing was a brick, he told himself—a fellow in a thousand.

These reflections, however, soon had to be swept aside.

Smithy had to devote all his energies to overtaking the man in front. And for the life of him he could not quite see how he was going to do it.

Courtfield was in sight now. The tower of its old Norman church stood in bold relief against the sky.

Smithy was fagged.

He was running his hardest, yet he failed to gain on Newman, whose energy seemed inexhaustible.

Despair began to seize him in its grip. His strength was failing him. He was exhausted, played out, finished.

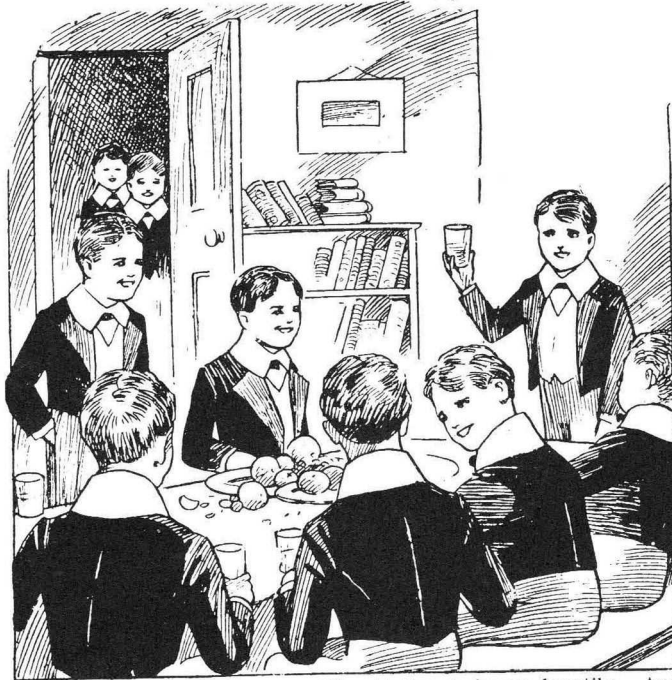
"If only I could overtake that beggar in front!" he murmured, over and over again.

And then, just as he was about to abandon the struggle

—for his head was throbbing painfully, and his legs felt like leaden weights—a startling thing happened.

Harry Newman, tripping up on a stone, which lay in his path, fell prone in the roadway with a sprained ankle.

It was indeed a stroke of good fortune for Smithy. He could never have hoped to overtake the champion in the ordinary way. Good runner as he was, he had his limits.



"It was a jolly fine performance!" said the chairman heartily. And then, raising his glass of ginger-pop aloft, he gave the toast, in tones which rang through the study: "The Winner of the Marathon!"

Smithy paused when he came to the fallen runner.

"Rough luck!" he jerked out sympathetically.

Newman looked up with a faint smile.

"Jove, kid, you've got some grit in you!" he said. "Never mind about me. Just you run on. There's another chap coming on behind."

And so there was.

The tall fellow whom Smithy and Redwing had passed at one stage of the race was now gaining ground rapidly.

Smithy set his teeth, and continued the struggle.

He lurched forward painfully, his breath coming and going in great gasps.

He wondered, as the green hedges slowly receded on each side of him, whether he would be able to last out.

And now he rounded a corner: and behold! the end was at hand.

He could see a crowd of people thronging the entrance to the recreation ground. And in the foreground were Harry Wharton & Co., waving their caps in the air, and shouting wildly.

"Smithy! Smithy!  
Good old Smithy!"

And now came the swift patter of feet behind him, and Smithy realised that he must put forward one supreme effort, or be vanquished.

Gamely he struggled towards the outstretched tape.

The other runner was almost level with him—almost, but not quite.

It was a near thing, but Smithy reached the tape first.

For one dizzy second he reeled; and then, flinging up his hands, pitched forward on

his face. But the afternoon's adventure had not been in vain. Smithy had won the Marathon!

Three hours later, rested and refreshed, Smithy was the guest of honour in No. 1 Study, where a stunning spread had been prepared.

When the feast was in full swing, Tom Redwing came in. He had taken longer to recover from his exertions than Smithy, who was hard as nails.

No reference was made to the Marathon Race until the last chocolate macaroon had disappeared from the dish. Then Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"We were very bucked to see you pull off the Marathon, Smithy," he said. "Nobody here thought you could do it—nobody except Tom Redwing, that is. We called you a madman and a fool. It seemed such a big thing to undertake. We expected to see you come in last, if you came in at all. And instead of that, you ran like a giddy Spartan, and won! We all congratulate you, and there is no doubt about it being one up to Greyfriars and two up to the Remove!"

"Six up to the Remove!" cried Bob Cherry.

"Remove a good first; Fifth-form and all others nowhere!"

"Spare my blushes," murmured Smithy.

"It was a jolly fine performance!" said Harry Wharton heartily.

And then, raising his glass of ginger-pop aloft, he gave the toast, in tones which rang through the study:

"The winner of the Marathon!"



THE END