

Raymond Glendenning's **BOOK OF SPORT FOR BOYS**

1957



signed

Scott

Contributions from all the great Stars of Sport. Another session of our famous Sports Brains Trust. Fiction by Frank Richards of Billy Bunter and Greyfriars fame.

Edith E. Hood



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Frank Richards

RIVALS OF THE RIVER



TOM KING had the Junior Sculls in his pocket: metaphorically speaking, of course. In the final heat he was up against Bullinger; and Bully, if he lacked Tom's ease and grace, was strong and sinewy, with the pull of a horse and the obstinacy of a mule. So it was certain to be a close contest. But Tom was going to pull it off, in the opinion of most Felgate fellows; and especially in the opinion of his chums, Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles. Indeed, in Study Four, Warren and Skip debated, not whether Tom would win the Sculls, but by how many lengths he would do it: Warren thought three, or perhaps four; while Skip more generously made it a dozen.

Everybody, or nearly everybody, was going to watch: the whole Lower School, and many of the Upper. Old Langdale, captain of Felgate, was to

officiate at the winning-post; it was rumoured that Dr. Leicester, the majestic Head himself, might give the race a look-in; and it was known for a fact that Charne, master of the Fourth, would be in the mob on the tow-path. The Junior Sculls was, in fact, an event! The course lay from Tip Island, in the Fenny, to a point just past the school boat-house; and all the way the rivals would be pulling under the eyes of a mob running on the bank. And unless something quite unexpected happened, all those innumerable eyes were going to see Tom King pushing length after length ahead of Bullinger. Nobody, naturally, expected the unexpected: least of all in the shape of Skip Ruggles. Certainly Skip did not.

Tom King was quietly confident of success; but he was very quiet and modest about it, that being his way.

Bullinger, on the other hand, was aggressive: he was rather an aggressive fellow. It irritated him to find that the consensus of opinion was that Tom would walk away from him on the Fenny. Even his pals Reece and Preece, glad as they would have been to see Study Four taken down a peg, did not believe that Bully could perform that feat. Bully's temper, never very good, was quite exacerbated; and that morning, in break, he stalked in the quad with a knitted brow, in a mood to quarrel with any fellow at a word: and it was not merely a word, but a stream of words, all of them unpalatable, that he heard from Stanley St. Leger Ruggles.

Skip was talking – that was his customary state. Skip had an apple in his hand – a large, ripe, red apple; but much as Skip liked apples, or anything else edible, he was too interested in his own remarks to take a single bite at it. Skip was holding forth on the subject of

the afternoon's race to five or six Fourth-Form fellows, and he did not notice Bullinger in the offing. Some of the fellows, who did notice Bullinger, were grinning, wondering how Bully liked it. Skip, noticing nothing, rattled on:

“Simply nowhere, you chaps – just nowhere! Bullinger's not bad – I know that! But is he in the same street with Tom? If the Sculls don't come to Study Four, I'll eat my hat, and Bullinger's after it! And Bullinger after his hat! Bullinger swanks a lot; but you can't swank a boat from Tip Island to the winning-post ahead of a better man. If swank would do it, Bullinger would be okay. But——”

Skip was interrupted at that point.

Bullinger came up behind him as he expounded his views. He did not speak. He simply let out a foot: the largest and heaviest in the Lower School at Felgate. He put his beef into it: and Bullinger had plenty of beef. His foot fairly banged on Skip's trousers.

Skip gave a startled yell, and hurtled. He hurtled headlong, landing on his hands and knees. Bullinger, scowling, stalked on; leaving half a dozen fellows laughing, and Skip sprawling and spluttering in breathless fury and indignation.

Skip scrambled up, crimson and furious. Skip was not a fellow to be booted with impunity. He glared round for his assailant. Bullinger was already at a distance. But the apple was still in Skip's hand. With all the force of a fat arm, he hurled it at Bullinger's head.

On the occasions when, on the cricket field, Skip essayed to bowl, anything was in danger excepting the wicket. Skip was one of those fellows who are born cack-handed. He had no



Skip was interrupted at that point



It caught the master of the Fourth just above the ear

more luck with the apple, than he had ever had with a cricket ball.

The apple missed Bullinger by a yard. That was really rather good for Skip Ruggles: two or three yards would have been more like his style. Bullinger, not even aware that an apple had been shied at his head, went on his way. So did the whizzing apple, naturally, as it met with no resistance. It whizzed on like a bullet; and, like a bullet, it found a billet. By one of those unfortunate coincidences that seemed to happen only to Skip Ruggles, Mr. Charne, walking the quad, walked across the line of fire. Fortunately, the missile, by the time it reached Charne, had lost most of its force. It caught the master of the Fourth just above the ear, and

gently but firmly lifted the mortar-board from his head and strewed it in the quad.

Charne gave quite a convulsive jump. "Oh!" gasped Skip.

The other fellows stared, in something like horror. Mr. Charne stood for a moment or two, staring down at a mortar-board that had dropped on one side of him, and at an apple that had dropped on the other. Then, with an extremely expressive expression on his speaking countenance, he stooped, picked up the mortar-board and replaced it. Then his eyes pin-pointed Skip.

"Ruggles!"

"Oh, crikey!" moaned Skip. "I - I didn't mean - I never did - I wasn't - I

- I - I - I - I mean I wouldn't didn't - .”

He was a little incoherent.

“You threw that apple, Ruggles.”

“It - it just went, sir - I never saw you, sir - I never meant——”

“No doubt,” said Mr. Charne. Charne was not likely to suppose that a boy of his form had deliberately buzzed an apple at his head! But that apple had been buzzed, deliberately or not. It had tapped Charne over the ear - it had knocked off his mortar-board. “If such an act had been deliberate, Ruggles——” He paused, as if words could hardly convey what would have been the result in that case.

“It - it - it was just an accident, sir——!” moaned Skip.

“Quite!” said Mr. Charne. “Such accidents must not happen, Ruggles. Missiles must not be thrown about recklessly in the quadrangle, Ruggles. You will be gated for the half-holiday this afternoon, Ruggles!”

With that, Charne walked on, frowning.

“Charne’s let you off cheap, you cack-handed ass!” remarked Preece.

Skip did not answer that. It was so: Charne might have marched him into his study and given him six of the very best. But Charne, a just man, made allowances for Skip, whom he, as well as all his form, knew to be the clumsiest ass at Felgate School or anywhere else.

But Skip did not feel that he had been let off cheaply. How, if he was gated, was he to watch the sculling race, and see Tom King glide home whole lengths ahead of Bullinger? Skip’s fat face was the picture of dismay. It was a heavy blow. At dinner that day, Skip ate hardly more than Tom King and Dick Warren put together: the worry of it affected his appetite!

II

“I’m going to watch the race!” said Skip.

“You can’t, if you’re gated!” said Tom King.

“I’m going to all the same.”

They were sorry for poor old Skip. It was so like him to get himself gated on an occasion when he was particularly anxious to be out of gates. But it could not be helped. Neither did it really matter so much as Skip supposed; for Skip had been going to see the start from Tip Island, and run with the mob on the tow-path; and everyone but Skip knew that he would be winded before half the course was covered, and left behind on the bank of the Fenny as lonely as Robinson Crusoe on his lonely isle. Skip did not know that, and it would not have comforted him to tell him.

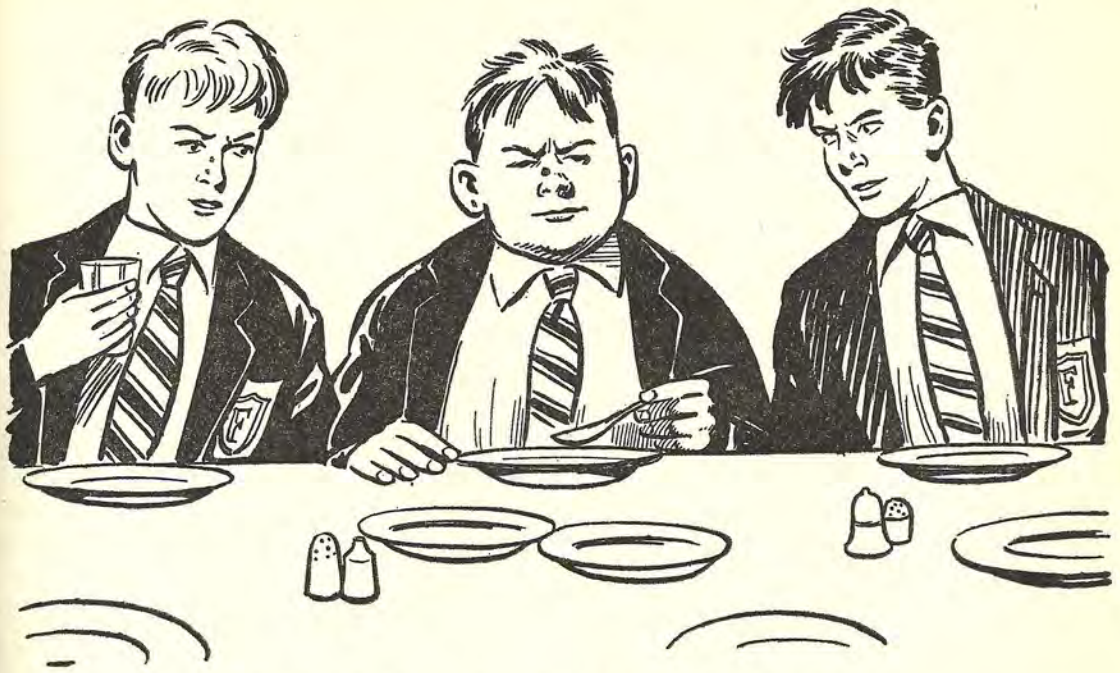
“I’m going to!” repeated Skip. “I don’t care if Charne whops me afterwards, so long as I see the race, and see you beat Bullinger.”

“But it won’t work,” said Tom. “Charne will be with the crowd on the tow-path - he’s said so - and if you turn up there, think he won’t spot you?”

“I’ve thought of that,” said Skip.

It was rather a surprise to his chums to hear that Skip had thought at all. It was not really in his line. But Skip had! He had set his fat brain hard to work on this.

“I know Charne’ll spot me, if I turn up on the tow-path, and send me back,” he said. “But I ain’t going to join the mob on the tow-path, see? I ain’t going to be on this side of the Fenny at all. I’m going to start early, and go over Fell Bridge to the other side, and climb



At dinner Skip ate hardly more than Tom and Dick put together

a tree on the other bank, see? You know that big beech tree, with branches sticking out yards and yards across the water – the biggest tree in Fell Wood. Well, sitting up in that tree, I shan't be able to see the start, but I shall be able to see the finish, and that's the chief thing. And if Charne thinks about me at all, which he won't, he won't guess that I'm parked up a tree across the river. See?"

Warren and King did not seem impressed.

"You couldn't climb that beech," said Warren. "Too much weight to lift."

"Yah!" was Skip's disdainful rejoinder to that.

"And if you did," said Tom King, "you'd fall into the river. You know what you are, Skip."

"If you think I'm a clumsy ass, Tom King——"

"If!" gasped Tom.

"Well, that's what I'm going to do," said Skip. "When you pass that beech, old chap, I'll give you a yell, to encourage you, see?"

Argument was wasted on Skip Ruggles. He was going to see that sculling race, and the way he had planned it, it looked a simple proposition enough. Charne's pin-point eyes would certainly have spotted him on the tow-path; but Charne's eyes would not be on the sweeping woods on the other side of the Fenny; and even if they were, they would not pick out a fat form ensconced in the foliage of the big beech. Afterwards, there might be a spot of trouble; but Skip was not worrying about afterwards. The present

tense was good enough for Skip. And his fat mind being made up, he started in good time, rolled down to Fell, crossed the bridge, and penetrated the deep dusky shades of Fell Wood, along the river.

He arrived at the big beech somewhat breathless; but he had breath enough left for the climb. He had, as Warren said, too much weight to lift, but he lifted it somehow, and sat down to rest where a great branch jutted out from the massive trunk. He would have been glad to sit it out, in that restful spot, but the thick foliage round him blanketed all view; and already an echo of distant shouting warned him that the race had started. Gathering what wind he had left, Skip crawled out on that great branch that extended over the river, almost to the end, and sat on it gasping for breath, considerably insecure, but keen as ever—with a

wide view of the rippling Fenny, of the tow-path on the other side, a shouting crowd thereon, and two light craft coming up under flashing sculls: one of them well ahead of the other. And Skip did not need telling which one was ahead.

III

“Go on, Tom!”

“Good man!”

“Buck up, Bully!”

“Spurt!”

Neither of the contestants heeded the shouts from the bank. They were too intent on the business in hand. It was a good race, for Bullinger, if he was not quite Tom's form with the sculls, was good at the game, and he was dogged and determined, and fearfully keen to beat Study Four. Half-way, Tom was leading by a length, and many of his friends on the bank, expecting more of him, shouted to him to “go on”. But Dick Warren, at least, could see that while Tom was keeping something in hand, Bullinger was already going all out: there would be more than one length when it came to the final spurt. Tom was content with his lead, pulling easily and coolly: fresh as paint while Bullinger was red as a turkey-cock. Once, twice, Bullinger's efforts overlapped his stern; but he drew ahead again, keeping the lead. The mob on the bank trotted, or ran, and waved caps, and shouted, unheeded.

Then, as he glided under a high extending branch of a great beech on the other bank, a yell closer at hand reached his ears. He had forgotten Skip: in fact forgotten everything except that he was pulling in a race he was going to win if he had it in him. He was reminded of Skip now.



Insecure . . . but keen as ever



That did it! . . . Splash

"Go it, Tom!" came a yell apparently from the sky. "I say, buck up, Tom! Put it on, old chap! Spurt, old fellow, spurt."

Skip, perched precariously on the high branch, was anxious. He wanted to see Tom shoot a dozen lengths ahead, and make sure of the thing. Tom glanced up as he shot past; and Skip shouted, and, releasing one hand from its hold, waved his cap.

That did it!

Splash!

Skip did not know how he came to slip from that branch. Skip often did things without quite knowing how.

He hit the Fenny like a plummet, and went down like one. Quite a water-spout rose into the air. Spray from that water-spout dashed in Tom's face,

ahead, and into Bullinger's neck, astern.

Skip disappeared.

"Oh!" gasped Tom King.

He cast one almost wild glance round. There was no help for Skip Ruggles from the crowded farther bank – no help anywhere at hand. And Skip could swim like a stone! Tom King was sculling in a race – a race that he was keen to win, and that he knew he could win; but he was not going to win that race by leaving the fat and fatuous Skip to drown astern. He ceased to scull, and Bullinger shot past him.

A fat head and a fat face rose from the water. Skip had gone deep: he came up half-suffocated, with fat hands clawing frantically at space. A dip of the sculls, and Tom reached him. He grabbed a collar, and the fat head came

clear of the Fenny, Skip puffing and blowing like a grampus and clutching with fat hands.

"Oh, you fat chump!" breathed Tom.

"Urrrrrrrrggh!" was all Skip could say in reply.

"Hold on, you benighted burbler."

"Wurrrrrrgh!"

Skip clutched on, and Tom pushed for the bank. He grabbed Skip and fairly hurled him ashore. Stanley St. Leger Ruggles sprawled in a thicket. There were thorns in that thicket, and Ruggles roared as he sprawled. Tom heeded him no further. Leaving Skip to sort himself out as best he could, Tom King sat to his sculls again.

But Bullinger was far ahead now. It had happened quickly – very quickly – but not only minutes, but moments, were precious. Tom measured the distance with one glance, and wondered – but only for a second. Then he was sculling again, with set lips. He was going to beat Bullinger.

Those few ounces in reserve came in useful now. Tom was going all out at last. To the crowd running on the tow-path he seemed to fly. Bullinger, already all out, was feeling the strain, and feeling it hard; but he pulled doggedly, determined to keep his ample lead. But the distance between Tom's bows and Bullinger's stern lessened and lessened.

"Go on, Tom!"

"Oh, well rowed!"

"Spurt! spurt!"

It was a straight reach to the finish and the winning-post was in sight, and old Langdale, with his eyes on the poles that marked the end of the course. Tom King was gaining – gaining fast – length after length was washed out; but Bullinger was still three ahead, and the end was near now – very near. But inch by

inch, foot by foot, Tom King was overhauling his rival: it was going to be a close thing. The crowd running on the tow-path yelled and shouted, and roared: even Mr. Charne's sedate visage showed signs of excitement when Tom's bows drew level with Bullinger's stern – and passed it.

"Spurt, Bully!" yelled Reece. But Bully had no spurt left in him.

"Oh! Tom! Spurt!" shouted Dick Warren, almost in anguish; and Tom King, with a last effort, spurted. It had seemed to him that he was at the limit of endurance; but there was still a kick left, and he put it in – his bows seemed to leap, and he shot past Bullinger, amid a roar from the tow-path that woke every echo along the leafy banks of the Fenny.

He hardly knew that he had won, and so close was Bullinger that many on the crowded tow-path hardly knew: but old Langdale knew.

"King wins! Half a length!"

Tom floated on, almost in a daze. But he found energy enough to scull to the school boat-house; while Bullinger, sinking over his sculls, had a helping hand. Tom almost tottered ashore, and Dick Warren fairly hugged his sagging chum.

A drenched and dripping Skip crawled in much later. He heard the glorious news, and no doubt it rejoiced him; but his aspect was not joyful, and his remarks were limited chiefly to "Atchooh! Aytishoooh!" Skip's dip had given him a tremendous cold, and he came in almost sneezing his fat head off; and if he expected sympathy from his chums, those expectations were not realised: they only told him that it served him jolly well right – as no doubt it did!