



Pulling Perkinson's Leg

By Frank Richards

PERKINSON had lost his temper. That was nothing new. Percival Perkinson, of the Felgate Fifth, had a very hasty temper, which he often lost. Perk was quite a good fellow: quite popular at Felgate, – as how could so great a games-man fail to be? If he flew off the handle occasionally, much could be forgiven to a man who played soccer as Perk did. Still, there was a limit: and punching Skip Ruggles in the eye was, in Skip's opinion at least, far beyond the limit.

There was, perhaps, some excuse for Perkinson. He had been sorely tried that morning. Often, too often, he was in trouble with his form-master, Kye.

Games, to Perkinson, came a long way before matters of minor importance, such as the acquisition of knowledge in form. And that afternoon Pelham were coming over to play Felgate: so it was quite natural, indeed inevitable, that Perk's mind should be full of soccer, to the exclusion of Livy. While Kye, on the other hand, expected the best winger at Felgate to concentrate now on Titus Livius, as if no such game as football had ever been thought of. The result was that Perk had handed out the most lamentable "howlers" that even he had ever perpetrated: and Kye had so scarified him with his tongue, while the other Fifth-form men grinned, that Perk had

emerged from the form-room, when the class was dismissed, in the very worst temper ever.

Perk, at the moment, was in a mood to row with anybody, friend or foe. Even his pal Purringe thought it best to leave him to himself for a bit. Perkinson stalked in the quad with a frowning brow, under which his eyes glinted. Sad to relate, it would have been a relief to him to punch somebody, had somebody given him cause – ever so little cause. And then Skip Ruggles happened: Skip being, as usual, the fellow to demonstrate the truth of the ancient axiom that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

Skip was quite oblivious of Perkinson. He did not know that Perk had perspired under the lash of Kye's tongue: neither would he have cared had he known. Skip had espied his chums, Tom King and Dick Warren, punting a footer in the quad, and cut across to join them. Perkinson, oblivious of Skip, had stalked in his way as he cut. Skip, going far too fast to stop, crashed into him.

Perkinson staggered and almost fell, barely regaining his balance. A charge with Skip's weight behind it was no light matter, even for a Fifth-form man. This was the last straw – charged over by a clumsy fat Lower boy. Perk's temper, already at boiling point, boiled over. Without stopping to think, he hit out. Skip caught that hasty, angry punch with his eye, and went over backwards with a surprised, indignant, and pained howl.

The next moment, Perk was sorry for what he had done. He was still in a state of high-pressure wrath: but he did realise that a smack at a fat head would have sufficiently met the case, while for a big senior to knock a junior down was quite outside. He was annoy-

ed with himself as well as with Skip: with the result that he gave the sprawling Skip a glare, and snapped "Look where you're going, you clumsy young ass!" and stalked on, leaving Skip to sprawl.

Skip sat up, his hand to his eye.

"Ow! Wow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Oh, crikey! Wow!" gasped Skip.

Tom King and Dick Warren came up at a run. They grasped their fat chum and heaved him to his feet. Skip stood and rubbed his eye. His fat face was crimson with wrath and indignation.

"Did you see that?" gasped Skip. "That ruffian Perkinson – he punched me in the eye – he knocked me over – wow!"

"You barged into him, you know," said Tom, soothingly.

"Jolly nearly knocked him over," said Warren. "All the same, it's too jolly thick. Does it feel bad?"

"It jolly well does!" gasped Skip, "I shouldn't wonder if it goes black."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom "There'll be a row if Charne sees a fellow in his form with a black eye. Let's look at it."

Skip was rubbing industriously. Evidently, he felt a pain where that punch had landed. However, he ceased to rub, and his friends surveyed the eye with rather anxious looks. They were concerned not only for Skip but for Perkinson. Black eyes were uncommon, if not unknown, at Felgate; a black eye was certain to leap to all other eyes, and it spelt trouble for the blacker thereof. If Skip's eye went black, it would undoubtedly transpire that it was Perkinson who had blackened it, with dire results for Perk. And Perk, for all his hasty temper, and his way of acting first and thinking afterwards, was a good chap, and he was a man who

could not be spared from the eleven when Pelham came over that afternoon. If he had to go up to the Head, goodness only knew just what the outcome might be. So Tom King and Dick Warren, being patriotic Felgaters, almost as keen on first-eleven victories as on their own junior matches, scanned that eye with anxious foreboding: and were immensely relieved to discern that it was revealing no sign of going black.

"It's all right," said Tom.

"Is it?" hooted Skip, indignantly.

"I mean, it won't show! You've made it red rubbing it, but it isn't black, or going to be."

"How do you know," snapped Skip.

"Fathead," said Warren, "If it was going black, it would be black already. Eyes don't go black in slow motion."

"Thank goodness," said Tom, "If Perk was landed in a row now, stuck in Extra perhaps, what would old Langdale do for a winger in his place? Might lose the match for us. It's all right Skip -."

Skip eyed his friends almost inimically. They seemed to be thinking more about Perk and soccer, than of Skip's dotted eye. Skip, not unnaturally, was chiefly concerned about the eye!

"If it goes black, and Charne walks Perkinson off to the Head, serve him jolly well right!" he exclaimed.

"Well, it won't," said Tom.

"I'm not so sure about that. Hitting a fellow in the eye -."

"He couldn't have meant it," soothed Tom, "I expect he was in a tantrum about something, and he just smacked out - he's a hasty sort of ass -."

"After all, it was only a tap," said Warren. "Forget all about it, old chap."

Skip glared.

"I like that from you!" he snorted, "Didn't you scrap with him once, be-

cause he pulled your ear - in one of his tantrums? I'd jolly well scrap with him myself, only - only - What are you grinning at, I'd like to know?"

Really, Tom King and Dick Warren could hardly help grinning, at the bare idea of little fat Skip "scrapping" with a towering Fifth-form man. However, they tried to look serious.

"Come on and punt the footer, old chap," said Tom.

"Blow the footer! Think I'm going to stand this?" hooted Skip, caressing his eye again, I'm going to get back on him for this, even if I can't scrap with him."

"Better forget all about it," advised Warren.

"Much better," urged Tom.

Snort from Skip! Usually, Skip Ruggles was a very placable fellow. But he was wrathful now - very wrathful. Perkinson of the Fifth was not the only fellow at Felgate who could lose his temper! Skip, it seemed, had lost his.

"I'm going in to bathe this eye now," he said, "And if it goes black -."

"It won't," said Tom.

"It can't," said Warren.

"That's all you know!" retorted Skip, "Perk will sit up a bit, I think, if he sees me with a black eye, and he can jolly well think of explaining it to the Head, instead of playing soccer. Fat lot you fellows care if a pal is punched in the eye by a Fifth-form lout too big for him to tackle. I can jolly well tell you that I'm going to get back on him, and I jolly well know how, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, and be blowed to you."

And with that, Skip Ruggles marched indignantly off, apparently with some scheme of retaliation on Perk working in his fat mind. Precisely what he meant, his chums did not know: but they did not particularly want to know, and they

resumed punting the ball, while Skip went in to bathe his eye. They did not see him again till tiffin, when they were glad to note that his eye, apart from a little redness, looked normal. If it was going black, it was certainly taking it's time about it. But a surprise was in store for them.

II

PERKINSON jumped.

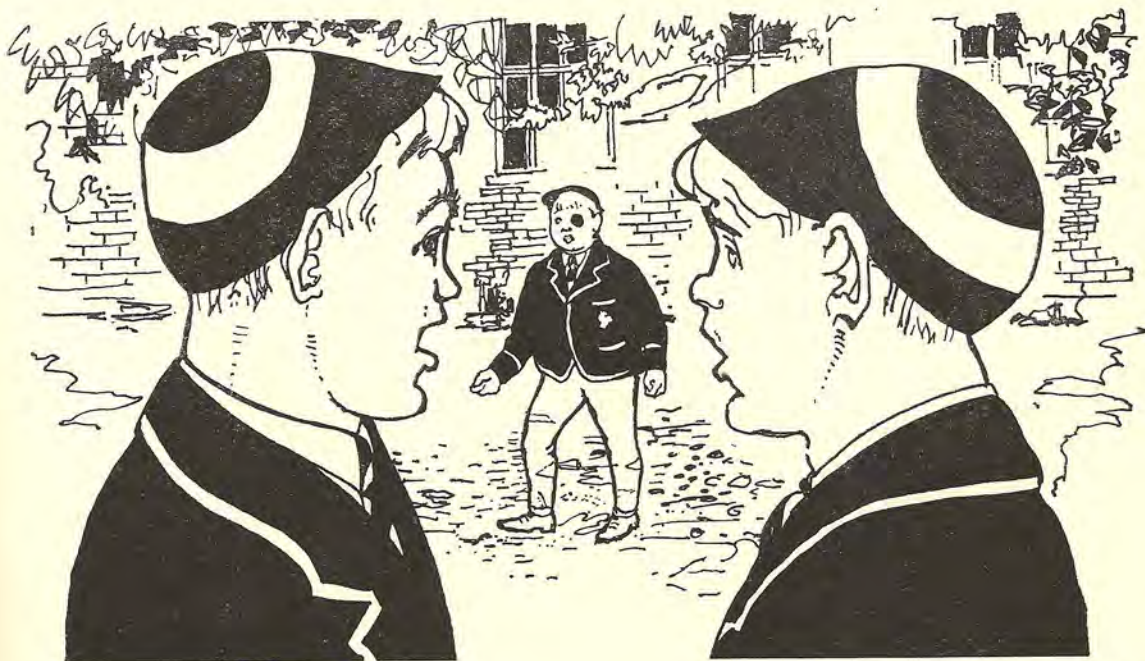
He jumped, in surprise, dismay, and alarm, almost clear of the quad. His pal Purring stared at him, seeing no reason why Perk should understudy a kangaroo at that moment. He glanced round to ascertain the cause. Skip Ruggles, of the Fourth Form, was rolling by, and it was upon Ruggles that Perk had fixed a horrified stare. Both Perk's eyes fixed on one of Skip's. That one was black as the ace of spades.

A Felgate fellow with a black eye was

an uncommon sight. It made Purring start a little. But it seemed to electrify Perkinson.

After dinner, Perkinson was in a happier mood. Livy, and Kye's biting sarcastic tongue, had faded from his mind, in the cheery anticipation of a glorious game that afternoon. Perk was at the top of his form, living and breathing soccer, feeling like going through Pelham like a knife through cheese. He had forgotten not only Kye and Livy, but also the fat Fourth-former who he had so hastily knocked over for barging him. Now he was reminded of Skip; most unexpectedly and unpleasantly.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Perkinson. Not for a moment had he dreamed that that hasty punch would black the kid's eye. He had not really put any force into it. It had simply been a hasty irritated punch, which properly speaking should have done no damage at all. But Skip had undoubtedly caught it with his eye. And that eye was black!



It was well and truly blackened. A blacker eye had never been seen at Felgate or anywhere else. Like Phoebus Apollo of old, it had made itself like unto the night! It couldn't have been blacker.

Skip rolled by quite near the two Fifth-formers, as if he wanted Perkinson to note that darkened eye, as no doubt he did. Perk certainly noted it. He noted it with horror and dismay.

"What's the row, Perk?" asked Purring, puzzled, "Never seen a young sweep with a black eye before?"

"I did it!" said Perkinson, in a hollow voice.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"I never meant to – never dreamed of it – I just knocked him over for barging into me – but – but – look at him!"

"Well," said Purring, with a deep breath, "That's the limit. You'll be sacked one of these days, if you don't learn to keep that silly temper of yours. You have blacked a kid's eye – ."

"I never meant – ."

"Fat lot that matters, if you did it. Charne's in the quad: as soon as he sees that kid's eye, there'll be a row. Did you specially want to go up to the Head just before the Pelham men get here? Better cut off and tell old Langdale that you won't be playing this afternoon. You'll be too busy interviewing your head-master."

Perkinson just groaned.

Skip gave Perkinson a look, as he rolled by. He did not speak. Having displayed that eye, he rolled on. He grinned as he rolled. He was still grinning, when two juniors rushed up to him breathlessly. Tom King and Dick Warren had spotted that eye, with amazement, and with almost as much horror as the unfortunate Perk. They scanned it with their own eyes bulging.

"It's black!" gasped Warren. "It's gone black."

"But how could it?" stuttered Tom, "It wasn't black at tiffin. Has somebody else punched you in the eye since tiffin, Skip?"

"Nobody's punched me in the eye except Perkinson," answered Skip. He chuckled, "I say, you should have seen his face, when he saw it."

Tom King cast an anxious glance round.

"Charne's in the quad," he muttered, "If he sees that, there will be a row. Keep it dark, Skip."

"It's dark enough," grinned Skip.

"Oh don't be an ass. Don't let Charne see it, before the soccer match, anyway. It won't matter so much afterwards. Do you want to dish Perk for the Pelham game, you ass? They'll be here any minute now."

"Blow Perk!" retorted Skip, independently.

"It's old Langdale, too – he'll be dished, if Perk's up before the Head instead of playing football. Be a sport, Skip."

"Here comes Charne now!" breathed Warren. And the stately figure of Mr Charne, master of the Fourth, loomed in the offing.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Skip. He grabbed out his handkerchief, and applied it to his eye, as if to rub away a troublesome insect. He seemed just as anxious as his chums that Charne should not spot that eye. Charne walked past unnoticed.

"This way!" hissed Tom. He grasped a fat arm, Warren grasped the other, and they hurried Skip away, by the path under the old Felgate oaks, where they were out of the general view.

"I say," bleated Skip, "Don't rush a fellow off his feet – I say – ."

"Fathead! You've got to keep that eye out of sight till after the soccer. Time enough for Perk to go up to the Head after the game."

"I'm not sticking here - ."

"You jolly well are! You shift a step, and we'll roll you over and sit on your head."

"Oh, all right," said Skip, "Perk's seen it! Did it give him a turn? Ha, ha! He'll be expecting Charne on his track every minute now. Perhaps he's sorry by this time for hitting a fellow in the eye. Perhaps he'll keep his paws to himself another time! What? Ha, ha, ha!"

And Skip, leaning his plump weight on an ancient oak, chuckled, as if that blackest of black eyes did not trouble him in the least; only tremendously amused by its dire effect on Percival Perkinson.

III

"BRACE up, old man," said Langdale.

"Oh! I'm all right!" stammered Perkinson.

"Anything wrong?"

"Oh! Yes. No I mean - well, no."

"Look here, if you're not feeling fit - ." Langdale surveyed Perkinson critically and a little anxiously. A less keen eye than the Felgate captain's could have seen that there was something amiss with Perk. "It's a bit late in the day, with the Pelham men here, but I'll ask Cadby - ."

"I tell you I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"Well try to look it, then," grunted Langdale.

It wasn't so easy for Perkinson to appear at his ease. At that moment, he ought to have been full of beans, keen as mustard, ready to do or die. He was keen enough, if it came to that. But he was in dread. That black eye of Skip Ruggles haunted him. The mere sight of it had struck him like a blow. There

was bound to be a row about it - an awful row. A senior man blacking a fag's eye - well, it would rock Felgate! Skip's beak could not have seen it yet, or the row would have started already. But any minute, any second, Charne's grim face might look into the changing room - in quest of that reckless blackener of eyes. Perk was on thorns. If the row kept off till after the game, it would be bad enough then: but if Charne came in now - !

Charne did not come in. Perkinson was understudying a hen on hot bricks: but nothing happened. But every minute was torment to the harassed Perk, and it seemed an age to him before the footballers went into the field. Even then he glanced about him anxiously: till the whistle went.

After that, he forgot Skip and everybody and everything else excepting soccer. Nature had not gifted Perk with much in the way of brains, perhaps: in class he was never likely to shine: but at games he did shine, and in soccer he shone like a bright particular star. Once in the game, with the ball at his feet, he couldn't have thought of anything else if he had tried - and he certainly didn't try. Soccer was enough for him to think of, for ninety minutes at least. And when, after a gruelling game with no score to either side, Perk landed the leather with a long shot, almost from the touchline, that looked impossible, and all Felgate roared "Goal! Good old Perk!" he felt like the classic gentleman who was like to touch the stars with his exalted head.

But after that, he had to remember Skip and his black eye!

IV

"HERE he comes!" muttered Purringe.



Perkinson looked hopeless.

They were in their study in the Fifth. It was an hour since the soccer match. Pelham had gone bootless home: and many Felgate men were celebrating the victory. But Perkinson did not feel like celebrating. He had retired to his study in a condition of the deepest pessimism. Purring couldn't comfort him. Every minute he expected a call to account. And what was he to say when he was marched off to the Head for blackening a fag's eye? Nothing except that he had lost his temper and hit out without thinking, – which wouldn't help him much with the Head! The Old Man was certain to come down heavy. It might mean Extra on half-holidays, and what about soccer then? It might even – Perk shuddered at the thought! – it might even mean the "sack". Whatever it meant, it was going to be awful for

Perk: and never before had any fellow so deeply repented of having let his temper rip. The sound of footsteps in the passage struck him like a knell. They were coming for him!

There was a tap at the door. It opened. But it was not a master, it was not a Sixth-Form prefect, who had come. It was Skip Ruggles. Skip stood in the doorway grinning into the study.

Perkinson gazed at him. Purring gazed at him. They gazed with almost unbelieving eyes. Where was that black eye?

The last they had seen of Ruggles, his black eye had leaped to their eyes. It had fairly hit them. It had been the blackest of black eyes. But there was no trace of it now. That black eye had vanished. How and why was a mystery. But it had!

Skip chuckled. The expressions on

those two astonished faces seemed to amuse him.

"What - what - what - ." Perkinson found his voice. He stuttered at Skip. "What - what - isn't your eye black?"

"Not now I've washed it off," grinned Skip.

"Washed it off!" repeated Perkinson, like a fellow in a dream.

"You see, it was only ink - ."

"Ink!"

"Just ink, rubbed round my eye! I did it to give you a turn, for punching me in the eye! Did you expect Charne to come after you? Getting ready to go up to the Head? Ha, ha!" roared Skip. "I'd jolly well have kept it up too, only Charne might have seen it! Ha, ha! Perhaps you will keep your paws to yourself another time, Perkinson! It might be a real black eye another time! Ha, ha, ha!"

With that, Skip disappeared from the doorway, departing rather hurriedly. But he need not have hurried. Perkinson was not thinking of kicking him the length of the passage. Perk was feeling too immensely relieved for that. Never had any fellow been so glad to discover that his leg had been pulled.

BUT if Perkinson refrained from kicking Skip Ruggles for that extraordinary leg-pull, Tom King and Dick Warren did not. Their legs also had been pulled: and when they learned how the matter stood, they fell with one accord upon their fat chum, and dribbled him round Study Four. Which considerably diminished Skip's glee over his success in pulling Perkinson's leg.

THE END