An East End Medly

Some years ago Dick Dorrance, an American poet, with inspiration from the flying machine wrote the following lines in the poem-“Cockpit in the clouds.”

The noon grounds The narrow streets.

The el trains move so slow, so slow.

Amidst their traffic, chaos, life,

the city’s busy millions go!

Up here, aloof, we watch them crawl.

In crystal air we seem to poise

behind our motors throaty roar-

down there, we’re just another noise.

Further proof of this truth will be found on a street in Dayton’s East end. Westward this street takes its view at the city skyline, undisturbed as jets 29ers and other ponderous Eagles of the blue cause an uplift for Westview eyes. Northward with this street we come to a big center of recreation and play-and then I realized that this whole area is one to occupy a place in any hall of fame, dedicated to all phases of “Sports Memories.” Southward down third Street way we find Roger Witte and his dad Duke-both are sports devotees, no matter what the sports. They know all about the Dayton Indians and the Cincinnati Reds-if you please, batting averages-home runs and club standings. And what better place to be, pray tell, than Hudson field or Crosley field? When football hits the calendar for touchdown, pass and punt, sportsman Roger cheers for the green and white, of, Chaminade. For Roger, is an Eagle class of 1949. All decked out in green and white next door is a friend of the great outdoors, Tom Brett. Out at Eastwood park beside quiet waters one often finds many fisherman, and among them Tom. For a long time he had a community comrade by the name of “Spike.” This fellow was a big English bulldog with a loyalty unsurpassed, and a spirit of play and fun-because I remember how he used to tease “ Sparky” across the way. Yes, “Spike” was a blue blood, a champion, if you please, chesty and assured who wore his blue ribbon with dignity of decorum.

Moving up a few numbers on this avenue of versatility the signals ring out-and ,an end, fleet of foot dashes out to grab a long forward pass for a touchdown. That is Lee Fenner senior, who years ago wore the colors Orange and Black for Stivers high and who later starred at end for the Dayton Triangles. His interest in the autum gridiron still carries on-as does his interest in fishing, bowling and baseball. And son Tommy brought out the boxing angle in the Golden gloves a few years ago. And while amid fistiance and the squared circle, that let me mentioned that big fellow near the Washington baseball diamond. He is none other than Seymour (Kick) Ramby-one of Dayton’s greatest Athletes. At Purdue he was “par excellent” in the backfield, and at boxing he was the champion of his class. His interest in sports and play no doubt was stimulated by the late Emma J Clark who for long years was principle of Washington school and whose baseball, basketball and track teams were championship contenders. James Levering, now principle of Washington, also believes in the motto “play-it-pays” because Jim himself was an outstanding player at Piqua high and many a touchdown he made for the red and white of old Miami as he crashed through the line from his position at fullback. The competitive spirit of Jim Levering is legend around, why Talowanda

As we cross East Third to the south of Washington we meet Mike Balsamb, and though diminutive in size was nevertheless a bantam cyclone in the ring. Rambling along we run into Frankie Hetzel who in his high school days was captain of the Stivers football team. A rugged lineman was Frankie in Orange and Black and just as rugged when he took to the wrestling mat with scissors, balance, leverage and groan-all except the last taught him by Sam Chasens, master teacher, who learned all the tricks when a wrestler at the University of Pennsylvania. Son Jack will carry on-because he fulfills the adage-The Early Bird Catches the Worm.

A close friend of Frankies is Richard Shafer or “Pee Wee”. Long a fixture in the East end, he punted them spirally under coach Horace English-himself a product from N. Sperling Avenue Way. Under coach Harper “Pee Wee” played sensational basketball at Stivers and sank baskets from beyond midcourt with reckless abandon. And wife Opal has most successfully supervised young Americans play in recreational centers. Up the hill again, I see men in baseball uniforms approaching Washington Park, and that again refreshes “Sports Memories”-because I think of Charlie McMichaels who used to win championships as manager of the 3rd St., Baptist church baseball team. And I also see a devout follower of those teams-his name Mr. John Sheets, sportsman, gentlemen, Cavalier and happy to say a man among men. John Sheets was one of natures noblemen.

This friendly area and arena has always been allergic to the great American game-intensified some years ago when Jack Rowan lived halfway up the hill. We all remember Jack when he was with the Dayton Vets and in the big leagues. Speed over the plate and long distances at fungo hitting characterized Jack in his long baseball career. And Jack was a part of the horseshoe brigade in the alley were the Jackson brothers-Lee and Harvey. Dr. Arthur, K.L. Corte, Leon Crowell, Mr. Garwood, Mr. Brumagen and others sought ringers, leaners and close ones.

While this was going on there was another group with golf balls and putters on the back lawn-making ready for 18 holes at McGregors or Community and Ed Blakely was champion of them all at golf. And just a little behind with the boxing gloves, and his work in room 213. These “Sports Memories” had their onlookers too. There was Eldon Kesserling who later played end under coach Floyd Stahl of Stivers. Roger and Ned Haynes often accompanied him as did Merle Arens. Now Merle is an all- round fixture in Dayton “Sports Memories.” The ball goes ping-the ball goes pong and Merle has won another table tennis trophy-one of the many in his trophy case. Merle thrives on competition as is evidence by his golf-plus and minus bogey-and by his Wisconsin fishing for that most elusive “Muskie”. When the shadows creep over the park Merle may receive an inspiration to write of recreation and play in rhyme. Clio and Erato have seized t Westview lyricist and he is away to an East End Medley:

Yes, the sportsman’s call reverberates

Along their peaceful street,

Just talk of games precipitates

Desired to once again compete.

Still through the years as sports prevail

And new changes feel the thrill

Of conquest-oft as not they hail

From Avenues which meet East Third Street hill.

Yes, my friend Merle is an architect of rhyme and now that the shuffleboard craze has come to land I am reliably informed that he is master of the disc and carom, block and bong-away. Yes indeed I would say that one of the favorite homes of shuffleboard is our East End arena and I say that with profound respect for the skill of Luke, George, Don, and many others. Luke is the champion of horse collars and leaners. And lest I forget there are Johnny and Bobby with that sturdy penthouse in the big elm tree. Hammers, saws and nails made them the craftsman of westward ho!

It is now the cool of the morning with that happy spirit of the complete angler abroad. August has gone to the reservoir or Huffman’s dam because that select fishing box the needs replenishing. Horace of tuba renowned has led himself away to a secret cove to try conclusions with crappie, cat and bass. And be it said that he never returns empty-handed. Jack and Billy Shafer along with their dad have had a joyful fishing excursions-fish or no fish, the sports the thing.

And they are on the wings of the morning goes Junior Wahlhardt on his bicycle-and perhaps he will someday emulate a Walthour or a Kiser. As I see him spin away I am carried back to sportsman Weber who not so long ago excelled at the rollerskating rink.

Red Fitzgerald, Louis Fleig and Ed Bagford are on the fairways for pars, and birdies and bogies and it is always a “Sports Memory” with a long downhill putt that just get in for a skin. Many good golfers are in the east end to help make it an East End Medley in sports. But no golfer ever excelled. Fritz Fitzgerald, with that most competent and accurate putter which the boys came to call “Skins Plus.”

There in the alley is a basketball hoop and backboard, and there one mere lad who practices stops and turns and then a basket. Here was the foundation for Harry Kneisley at a regular at Wilbur Wright. Harry is quite a baseballer too as is Billy McCord across the Avenue who sings and whistles while he plays and works. Bobby Kreupper looks on with approval and then shoot an arrow into the air-Hiawatha-like because Robert is adept at archery.

As I see these lads I am carried back to the day when Richard Jackson played at this very same spot. Richard who played in the backfield for Fairview lost his life in the recent war. A great boy was Richard and I shall never forget when he sang-“I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles.”

November days came sharp and shrill to tell us that the hunting season was on and away went Ed and Kenneth. No finer sportsman ever took to the field and stream than these two men and their interest in sports serve as a symbol of fair play and wholesome relaxation.

Up Garland way I meet Leonard Mann to takes every sport in stride, hockey in Detroit and Cincinnati included. Leonard is evident of “Play-It-Pays.” For Mr. Mann there really is no such thing as a “No Sale” in the arena of sports-and that goes for the Zimmer boys, Neal, Bill and Clyde, and Clyde Willis. And I honestly believe that Dody Pasco was the best informed sportsman on the Cincinnati Reds.

I am well aware that America is a country of sportsman and no matter what the Avenue we shall find there a devotion to sports and play. But the Avenue of which I speak is somewhat exceptional-since it is but a small Street, making ready to move southward.

As I come toward the end I cannot leave this East End Medley without paying tribute to a gracious lady who lives on my street. Her name, Mrs. Sheets. A long, long time ago when knights were bold, the minnesingers or love poets, wrote dainty and graceful lines. What a fitting subject our lady with the ever-beaming smile would have made for them! She is the lady who saw so much of what I have related and she enjoys everything she sees. She takes such genuine pleasure in every common sight and in studying every person. When you talk to Mrs. Sheets you feel that a chivalrous poet is right at your elbow. This gracious lady is most certainly a poet of the pageantry of sport and play in our East End Medley. And with Lewis Carroll we can say;

“Thus grew the tale of Wonderland,

Thus slowly, one by one,

Its quaint events were hammered out

And now the tale is done.

And home we steer, a merry crew

Beneath the setting sun.”

Just a fitting epilogue for our East End Medley.

Robert Worst 1949