Oklahoma’s Mercury ---

Tom Churchill

By Frank L. Dennis, ’28, of the Kansas City Star

WHO is the greatest all-around athlete in America today? I believe he is Tom Churchill, and the records bear out the belief.

Promptly someone will suggest that Barney Berlinger of Pennsylvania is a greater all-around athlete than Churchill.

A GOOD WINNER, A GOOD LOSER

Tom Churchill takes victory like a gentleman. He takes defeat like a gentleman. This has impressed sport writers like Alan Gould of the Associated Press about as much as Tom’s versatility. At left he is seen shaking hands with Barney Berlinger of the University of Pennsylvania who narrowly beat out Tom in the decathlon. Churchill calls Berlinger his best friend and has the highest admiration for him. Photo by International Newsreel.

other major intercollegiate sports and is exceptional in several others.

What is the history of this remarkable athlete, this modern Olympian? Well, Tom’s story is a saga of struggle, best told by tracing it from the time he was a chubby schoolboy at Dalhart, Texas, grimly striving to win a place on the ward school teams, past the climax of his selection to represent America in that most grueling competition, the decathlon, in the Olympic games, to the denouement, his present every-day competition in intercollegiate athletics.

ABOVE is a scene during the 110 meter hurdle race in the Decathlon at the Penn Relay games held at the University of Pennsylvania April 26. showing left to right Everette E. Utterback of Pittsburgh, Tom Churchill and Alden Holsinger of Juanita college. Photo by International Newsreel.
AN AMERICAN DISCOBOLUS: CHURCHILL IN THE PENN RELAYS

Tom Churchill, Oklahoma's great Olympian, about to hurl the discus in the thirty-fifth Penn relays at the University of Pennsylvania April 26. Churchill won the discus by throwing it 125 feet two inches. The Associated Press declared of Churchill and other athletes at the Penn Relays: "Youth usually holds complete sway in the Pennsylvania relay carnival but this year's competition has developed one of the strangest contrasts involving youth and age, between Paavo Nurmi, middle-aged foot racer, and two braying youths who are destined to be among America's greatest all-round athletes, Barney Berlinger of Pennsylvania, and Tom Churchill of Oklahoma, both just at the voting age." Many sport writers have called Churchill America's greatest all-around athlete.
TOM CHURCHILL was born February 26, 1908, at Blair, Oklahoma, which makes him 21. Doing the chores and chasing calves on his Uncle Tom's ranch helped develop the legs that have carried Tom to international fame—and fame is the word, for who is more glamorous in this day than the great athlete, excepting Lindbergh? And Lindbergh is now merely Anne Morrow's husband.

By the time Tom was a freshman in high school at Dalhart, Texas, he had outgrown an earlier tendency toward roly-polyness. That year he broke into football as fullback and into basketball as forward, making the all-conference team in the latter sport, as a 14-year-old boy. As a sort of chaser, he high-jumped, pole-vaulted and threw the discus for the track team, breaking the high jump record at the Panhandle meet at Goodwell, Oklahoma.

Tom attended Dalhart high the fall of his second year and played football again, but moved to Oklahoma City during the winter, with his parents, and for the first time in his life had a coach.

Roy S. Bennett of Central high school coached the sturdy 15-year-old in basketball to a letter at forward. In the state track meet he won second place in the discus.

Tom whiled the summer away playing baseball, making all-city catcher in the Junior league.

Tom's parents being about as restless as their son, they moved to Wichita, Kansas, early in his junior year and took him along. He played regularly at end on the football team.

Now, Wichita always has good basketball teams, so it was no small feat when Tom made forward on the court squad. His team won the state championship, with Tom making forward on the all-state second team, and then went to Chicago to win the national interscholastic championship, drubbing a great El Reno, Oklahoma team in the final game, and with Tom making all-American forward on several newspaper selections.

Track was something of a dessert for the Oklahoma boy that year. He merely threw the discus and javelin, put the shot, pole vaulting, high jumping, and running on the mile relay team to assist Wichita to state and Kansas Relay championships.

Then he "got going," back in Oklahoma City Central in his senior year. He played tackle on the football team, which lost only to a great Muskegee eleven and which tied an otherwise all-victorious Norman team.

No one who saw Tom play in the final game of the state high school basketball tournament that year, in the armory, at Norman, will forget it. It was a great duel between two great teams and between two great players, Churchill at center for Central and Willingham at center for El Reno. El Reno won (it was Central's only defeat of the year) but I would say Churchill and Willingham tied in their individual duel. At any rate, both were on the all-state team.

As a preliminary to the track season that spring, Churchill set six records in the city meet at Oklahoma City—discus, shot, pole vault, low hurdles, and broad jump. The broad jump was the best Tom ever made—23 feet, 7 inches.

In the state meet at Norman a burst of blood vessel in one foot held him to second place in the pole vault, and he was unable to enter the other events. However, he made up for it the following week at Stillwater by winning enough points by himself to win the state title for his school.

All that spring he had been going out for baseball in addition to track, and by dove-tailing the baseball and track schedules at the two state meets managed to help pitch Central to the final of one tournament and far along in the other. He lost only two games that season.

During the summer preceding his senior high school year Tom had won second in the state high spring board diving championship, so in an emergency one night he was called on to dive for the Central team in a dual meet and lettered, thus winning five letters in one year.

In four years of high school Tom made 14 letters, was chosen best all-around athlete at both Wichita and Central highs, won 58 medals and several other trophies in addition to the admiring glances of girls and university coaches, the latter group hoping to proselyte successfully.

The University of Kansas came near—darned near—getting Churchill's enrollment the fall of 1927. All his high school coaches were K. U. men and wished him to go to Lawrence, which he nearly did.

But Bill Haller and Mickey McBride proved as capable in strategy as in Sooner athletics, so Tom became a Sigma Nu and a Sooner instead of something else and a Jayhawker.

His freshman year at Norman he suffered a broken leg while playing tackle on the Boomer eleven, but recovered in time to play center and forward at basketball. His versatility was further shown that freshman year when Tom, seeking to while away the time, won both the 175-pound and heavyweight fraternity wrestling titles and the all-university boxing championship.

Side issues, these contests, but indicative of that superlative ability that called for Uncle Sam's selection of him, the next year for participation in the Olympics.

I believe the greatest test Tom ever had was in the football season his sophomore year. Ad Lindsey, serving his first year, was puzzling out a successful combination. Tom played end, tackle, guard and halfback, doing most of the punting, and winning an all-Missouri Valley honorable mention.

In basketball that year he was forward on that notable all-victorious team and was all-Valley forward if ever there was one. He paired perfectly with the great Bruce Drake.

Fortunately, Tom's sophomore year was an Olympic games year, and John Jacobs drilled him rigorously in the decathlon, ten wearying events, after winning the Kansas Relays decathlon with over 7,300 points and taking third in the Penn Relays with some 7,300. Tom set an unofficial world's record in the decathlon in Norman in a tryout, with 7,900 points—perfection in the ten events scores 10,000. It is significant that Tom's best mark in the decathlon came a time when he was rested. I doubt that he has been rested since.

Anyway, he scored fourth place in the Olympic tryout and fifth place in the Olympics proper, with more than 7,419 points. At Ghent, after the Olympics at Amsterdam, Tom picked up a few medals and cups just for the fun of it.

To my knowledge the best marks Tom ever made in the decathlon were these: 100 meters, 11.2 seconds; broad jump, 21 feet, 8 inches; high jump, 5 feet 8¾ inches; shot put 42 feet; 400 meters, 51.3 seconds; 110 meter high hurdles, 51.6 seconds; discus throw, 131 feet; pole vault, 11 feet, 8¾ inches; javelin throw, 168 feet; and 1,500 meters run, 4 minutes, 38 seconds.
ters, holding his mind open so far as convictions on these as on other matters, holding his mind open so far as possible to the reception of new truth. But an elaborate creed is not a necessity for effective co-operation in church work. A group unified in the spirit of loyalty to the Founder of Christianity can get on very well without a further creed. It is the life that counts. If the Christian world could have perceived this a long time ago, the world might have been much farther along on its intellectual pathway, and a lot of noble martyrs might have died in their beds.

The church of the future, then, it seems to me, will be relatively a creedless church, laying stress on the cultivation of the spiritual life and treating with indifference the wealth of this world except as an instrument for human betterment. It will not cater to the wealthy; it will insist upon a condition of true democracy. It will regard an atmosphere of friendliness as of more importance than upholstered pews. It will find ways and means of bringing the gospel of hope and abundant life here on earth to those who need it most. It will lay stress on purity and nobility of life here on earth as the best training for whatever may be in store for us on the other side of the veil.

FINALLY a word about our international relations. A new conception of the brotherhood of man is spreading. The first of the new Ten Commandments of Social Justice promulgated by the federal council of churches runs thus: "I am the Lord thy God, but thou shalt remember that I am also the God of all the earth. I have no favorite children. The Negro and the Hindu, the Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Mexican are all my beloved children."

The ninth commandment turns out to be related:

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor by malicious propaganda or colored news, or by calling him contemptuous names such as Dago, Chink, Jap, Wop, Nigger, or Sheeny."

What are the causes of international dislike and distrust? This is not the time or place for a full discussion of these matters, but I want to lay stress on two: First, ignorance, and the distrust born of ignorance. This is markedly characteristic of primitive peoples. Even the Greeks were not free from it; they called foreigners barbaroi, 'chatters' and declined to take the trouble to learn their languages or borrow anything from their cultures, with the one exception of Egypt. Secondly, the struggle for trade and for a field of investment or exploitation, which we now know lies at the bottom of imperialism. Commercial rivalry, it is now generally perceived, has much to do with precipitating the world war; and many students of international relations now believe that imperialism is one of the most fertile sources of war. It was certainly directly or indirectly at the bottom of most of the foreign wars in which we have become involved, the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War. And it is a condition which will bear watching. Why were the marines lately sent to Nicaragua? It has been answered by some, to defend the interests of American capital, money invested by private citizens, which should have been placed at their own risk. But through influence with the authorities they prevail upon the government to back them up with gunboats and marines. And thus arises friction, distrust, hatred, which may easily breed war.

The tendencies to which I have directed our attention, the threatened disruption of the home, our distrust of science, the death of good teachers, the decline of the influence of the church, economic rivalry, and imperialism are not likely, if checked in time, to result fatally. The good sense and the awakened intelligence of our people, we may well hope, will prevent our country from drifting into another international situation like that of 1914. It is still true that righteousness exalteth a nation. It is equally true and equally important that only through intelligence shall the soul of a nation be saved.

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Tom Churchill

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In this, his junior year in the university, Tom's athletic record has been no less noteworthy than was the epic sophomore year.

He made all Big Six end and all-Western end in football; all-Big Six forward in basketball and was high scorer in the conference, aided in the latter by his teammates, of course; and I noticed him given all-American basketball rating in some selection or other. This spring he was second in the septathlon in a Texas meet; successfully defended his Kansas Relay decathlon title, proving his courage there with a whirlwind finish to defeat the runner-up; and improved his Penn Relay decathlon rating to second.

If there is any criticism that Tom is an individualist, this might be an antidote: he has played on football teams in high school and college that won forty-two and lost but twelve games; and on basketball teams that won 102 and lost but nine. Teams on which he has played have won eight championships.

Just to conclude his athletic record, it is worth citing that he once set an Oklahoma City bowling championship, that he is an excellent tennis player, and that he even managed to beat the writer at golf—once.

So much for Tom Churchill's athletic record to date. He has another year in college. But to complete the story: he is six feet two inches tall and weighs 193 pounds when in best condition, although lately a tendency to overweight has bothered him.

Tom is part English and Irish, and is one-sixteenth Cherokee, being one of very few athletes of Indian blood to represent America in the Olympics. The Indian blood hasn't helped him financially, either—he works his way through the university. And his grades are about average—which means that they would be higher if his time were not divided between study and athletics.

Tom will make a good captain of the basketball team next year and perhaps a captain of industry or business later on. He's no "dumb athlete."

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