

# Furman Bisher



## Can Oldfield Be Real?

ATLANTA—You'll have to forgive me if I still remember my first introduction to Brian Oldfield as if I had been struck by a cab. First place, you think of the name "Oldfield," you think of speed. I guess Brian might run the 100 in two hours. You must consider that the other Oldfield cheated. Barney used wheels.

You swear that Brian Oldfield's out of some movie, but you can't remember the name. He can't be real. Maybe Nat Pendleton played the part. Or was it Dick Shawn? I mean, you talk about the American male animal, I want to introduce you to our leading grizzly.

BRIAN OLDFIELD HAS a voice like a door that needs oiling. His muscles are threatening. Touch one, it's liable to explode. His body looks as if it were cast. And when he walks, he looks like a robot whose spring is wound too tight.

Sportswriters are inclined to belabor statistics and measurements. Oldfield's specs are 6-5, 265 pounds, but forget it. He looks strong enough to grab Ali and grind him into sausage with his bare hands.

His act is heaving a 16-pound steel ball. Offhand, it doesn't sound like a helluva lot of fun. Heave another guy across the Rappahannock, or stop a speeding train with one thrust of the

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pages that the book was self-serving and that Leo often wasn't telling it as it was.

For one thing, I didn't like it when, sounding somewhat like St. Leo, the brassy close-to-70 codger trotted out the shortcomings of others, i.e., the drinking of Horace Stoneham, Van Lingle Mungo,

sized alarm clock to and fro from the Cardinals' dugout.

**DUROCHER'S** point about Chandler is that the former Kentucky senator and governor was picking on a poor, defenseless manager when he suspended Leo the entire 1947 season for conduct considered detrimental to baseball.

Something to be remembered from the autobiography, even if it's not members writers as \$100 reporters.

I salute Durocher for criticizing Frank Frisch with having screamed at him to wait on the ball and hit behind the runner. Leo did that so well with the Gas House Gang that the All-America Out was

copy, I wish that Tommy Holmes had devoted a book to The Ship rather than just a chapter in "The Dodgers." Holmes was honest, fair and objective (even for a dedicated Dodger fan) and that's a heckuva good literary double-play combination.

Is there a best-seller ABOUT, rather than BY, Leo Durocher in somebody's typewriter? I hope so.

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fist, fine. Great fun. But heaving a steel ball? And as far as heaves it, he can't even hear the thud if he cups his ears.

"A BIG, DUMB act," he calls it. "You probably don't even think I know arithmetic."

In the guide of the International Track Association, it is said of Brian Oldfield: "Drifter—has shot, will travel."

Every bit of it. Somehow or another, you don't think of Middle Tennessee State U. when you think of the fine art of shot-putting. Brian Oldfield wouldn't have, either, if it hadn't come about this way, the inaugural in his career of drifting:

He came out of Elgin, Ill., intending to go to the University of Tennessee at the invitation of Chuck Rohe. When he reached Knoxville, he says, "Rohe told me he'd already hired a boy from Georgia, who also played tackle on the football team, so they get two for the price of one."

**ROHE SUGGESTS** Middle Tennessee, a few hours' drive to the west in Murfreesboro. "That was an act to keep me out of the Southeastern Conference so I won't beat his man from Georgia in the meets. But I'm young and dumb and don't know, so I go. Sweet guy, that little man."

He lives in San Jose, Calif., now. "Shoulda gone to California in the first place." Of course, if he had he'd probably have wound up weight-lifting. That crowd on Muscle Beach won't let a prospect like

Oldfield get away. You don't have to be an Eagle Scout and valedictorian to graduate with that set. You just have to look as if somebody pumps you up every morning.

Oldfield is almost 30 years old, and you'll say that's a little elderly for a fellow running around tossing iron balls. And you would be right. But the ITA has made it worthwhile with money. You can't make \$25,000 for a few weeks heaving steel in a factory.

**OF COURSE**, when I see Brian Oldfield changing from stage finery to street clothes in a boiler room, I'm inclined to wonder if he and the steel didn't come up the same way. I don't mean there wasn't a better place. The boiler room just happened to be closer to where the pretty girl with the long blonde hair was playing the Omni organ, and keeping the crowd lulled between events.

"It's a gas, baby," he said to the organist. "It's a gas."

"Anything you say, sir," said she. "Anything you say."

You should be apprised that I grew up in the age when the world was agog that Jack Torrance had thrown the shot 55 feet, five inches. It was nearly 15 years before another American did it. That was Jim Fuchs.

Then came the shattering era of Perry O'Brien and the crashing of the 60-foot barrier. An awakening. Such as the earth had never dreamed of seeing.

One recent day in El Paso, Tex., Brian Oldfield whirled about and delivered the 16-pound ball 75 feet—40 years later, 20 feet farther than Jack Torrance. They say he has

pitched it 80 feet in practice.

There are those who challenge his form. He winds up and whirls about discus-style. It won't pass with the amateurs, they say, though Europeans have been whirling for years.

"I THREW THE discus," he says, describing how he converted to the new style, "and I'd horse around with the shot the same way. With the spin, I was getting it so much farther out there, I decided I had to switch. So I

switched.

"Let 'em holler. They'll all be doing it that way soon. You keep it under your chin, and you don't foul, there's nothing illegal about it."

Unless somebody wants to put a limit on muscle. He could always transfer to the circus. Then everybody would complain if he didn't heave the shot 70 feet or more every night. In fact, they're already doing it. Give 'em 75 feet and they want a mile.

## Journal Looks at TSN

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recent years is the "save," which is awarded to baseball relief pitchers who preserve victories for their teams. And that innovation was the brainchild of Mr. Holtzman of the Chicago Sun-Times, not any regular SPORTING NEWS staffer.

But SPORTING NEWS' readers apparently don't look to the paper for anything new or startling; rather, they seem to wish only to be immersed in words and numbers that pertain to the objects of their affections.

Few publications anywhere enjoy the sort of rapport with its readers that THE SPORTING NEWS does. A recent survey it took showed that readers spent more than two hours a week perusing its pages; comparable figures for other weekly magazines indicate that about a half-hour is par for the course. The paper sells about 4,000 binders a year to people who want

to preserve each issue for posterity. A nun once wrote to confess that she regularly smuggled the paper into her cell, hiding it beneath her habit. And the wife of an Iowa subscriber of 57 years said her husband stipulated that a copy of the publication be placed in his coffin with him.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Due to the policy of The Wall Street Journal, no deletions or revisions were permitted in reprint privileges of the above article. However, in the interests of accuracy, THE SPORTING NEWS considers it important to cite errors in the amount of payments to contributors and correspondents; also that the relationship between THE SPORTING NEWS and The Sporting Goods DEALER in the financial structure of the firm is more equitable than the author

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