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KING OF CENTRE COURT

**Billie Jean
Wins Another Wimbledon**





AND A HAPPY LOSER THAT'S No. 1

It seemed a strange place to win a U.S. championship, but that is what Northeastern did in the semifinals at Henley. Then came some rugged Russians, and there were bad times on the Thames **by HUGH D. WHALL**

As the eight-oared shell glided to a stop after crossing the finish line, shouts rang up from the crew that must have confounded the English spectators. "We're No. 1!" the rowers from Boston's Northeastern University called out over the still waters of the Thames, even though they had merely won a semifinal heat and were yet to be tested by a strong Russian crew. If the phrase was one that might have sent shivers up the spine of the late Nancy Mitford, guardian of the upper-class English idiom, it made good sense to the Americans in attendance. Northeastern had just won the U.S. row-

ing championship, not at Syracuse or Worcester or Philadelphia or Seattle, but at Henley, by beating the University of Wisconsin by the length of a boat.

The Huskies—not to be confused with those other Huskies from the University of Washington who were also on the scene—were only one of a record 26 American crews in single sculls and doubles and fours and eights who swarmed over the historic course and all but turned Henley Week into an old-fashioned hoe-down for the colonies.

That "all but," sad to report, eventually crabbed the works for the Ameri-

cans. The trouble was the Russian crew, Trud Kolomna, all necks and shoulders and eager to collect the Grand Challenge Cup that another Soviet boat had won the year before. A cavernous silver goblet, the Grand Challenge Cup dates back to 1839 and has become the most illustrious prize in rowing. First, on Friday the Soviets swept by the University of Washington to easily take their semifinal duel—only two crews race at a time at Henley—and wreck any expectation of an all-American final. Then on Saturday, bolting off the mark, they destroyed in just 200 meters the strong hopes that



The Boston boys relish their Husky triumph over Wisconsin (above), but a day later are humbled by Trud Kolonna gliding past the finish line.



Henley belonged to America this year. Northeastern, flat from its hard race with Wisconsin the day before, never got going and struggled home almost three lengths behind Trud.

One consolation for the U.S. was that a lot of others won: Harvard's junior varsity in the second most important event, the Ladies' Challenge Plate; Princeton's lightweights; Northeastern's four with cox; Mark Borchelt and Terry Adams of the Potomac Boat Club in the pairs; and, by a chauvinistic stretch, the U.S. also took the Diamond Sculls. An Irishman, Sean Drea, won that event, but he is a student at St. Joseph's in Philadelphia.

Before the regatta began, Wisconsin Coach Randy (Jabbo) Jablonic said, "It doesn't really matter whether you come first, second or last here. What really matters is that you have rowed at Henley." This year's Henley Royal Regatta was all it has ever been said to be. The town of 9,000 people and some 89 pubs—it is boasted that not one drop of the excellent local brew ever leaves town—was draped in the green and white and red of its willows, turkey oaks and roses and lush clipped lawns. As adornments to the four hectic days of rowing were an old-fashioned garden party, a cocktail party, an English village fete and a school sports day, and everywhere there were reminders that old England may have gone, but it has not been entirely forgotten. There on the Buckinghamshire side of the Thames was the ultraexclusive Phyllis Court Club with its canopied terrace, and a biscuit's throw away on the Berkshire side was the almost as exclusive Stewards' Enclosure.

An ancient launch with shiny varnished hull and gleaming steam engine puffed by through shoals of punts, wherries and other gorgeous small craft. Beneath its surrey top a party gurgled on at full swing. Approaching the log boom that marks one edge of the 80-foot-wide, two-lane course, the launch slowed beside a punt full of ladies eating their picnic lunch. "Have you enjoyed your meal?" inquired a partier easily. "Oh, jolly good. Jolly good." He held a drained Moët bottle over the side upside-down and shook the champagne drops out ever so gently. "You wouldn't have any more of this, would you?"

The answer disappointed him.

"Oh, sorry," he replied. "Jolly good."

Ashore, though it was a working Wednesday—England does not yet cel-

ebate Independence Day—the parking lots were jammed, Rolls-Royces fender-to-fender with Jaguars, Ferraris and other exotic machines, as well as lesser breeds. They belonged to England's upper strata who crowded into the Stewards' Enclosure wearing bright blazers and school caps of another era. Behind the grandstand that is reserved for members, the old oars shuffled across the immaculate lawn as if in time to tunes like *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* and *Waggery for Woodwinds* that were being played by the Royal Marine Band, resplendent in its full dress.

Like flowers on the river, the oarsmen's wives drifted about in floppy garden-party hats and long skirts. "So Margaret's pregnant," said a striking pink. Replied a flowered number, "Oh, how charming of her."

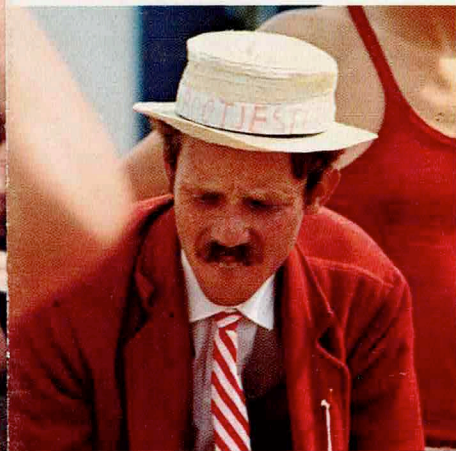
In the lunch tent near by cold meats and vichyssoise were served along with strawberries and thick cream, all to be washed down with champagne. Shades of Wimbledon some 35 miles away, one thought. "Do you tip?" an American asked a chap with a flying red mustache, white flannels and dazzling blazer.

"Slippy sliders under the plate," was the reply, "but don't embarrass the stewards." There are 44 stewards of the Royal Henley, men of station such as Lord Cottesloe, G.B.E.; the Bishop of Chester; and Lord Nugent of Guilford, P.C. to name but three, and they are not noted for their easy way with a gratuity.

American crews have been rowing at Henley since the last century. The first time they won the Grand Challenge Cup was in 1914 when Bob Herrick coached a Harvard crew led by Leverett Saltonstall, the ex-U.S. Senator. "It was the custom then to coach from horseback, and I rode an old white horse that was used in turn by other coaches," Herrick once said. "The horse had become so thoroughly accustomed to his duties riding alongside the crew that if the crew stopped he would stop, and start again the moment the crew went on."

Times at Henley have not moved along much since Herrick's horse days, and the crowd is as expert as ever. "You can talk about your Big Ten football fans and the Big Eight, but when an oarsman hears the crowd cheer at Henley he's heard everything," says Jablonic. "Here the fans know what they're talking about. They can tell you what's wrong with your start, how you should row the middle of the





race, what's wrong with your five man."

In the end, Jablonic may well have thought he could have used some advice. His Wisconsin crew had come to England determined to prove itself this year's U.S. champion—unofficial though the title would be. Wisconsin had lost to Northeastern in the Eastern Sprints at Worcester, Mass., but it had come back later to win the IRA at Syracuse with Northeastern a badly beaten third. The University of Washington possibly would be a problem. Winners of the Western Sprints, the Huskies were undefeated, but they passed up the IRA, had met neither of the other two top crews and, it was felt, there might be more thrash and splash to their achievements this season than solid blade work. The three competed at Nottingham the week before Henley, but the results there were not conclusive. Only one American crew was permitted to race for the main cup. Wisconsin won the right by beating Washington in two straight half-races on a foreshortened course of 1,000 meters, then lost to a Hungarian crew in the final. Competing for a less important cup, Washington came in third behind the winner, Northeastern, and Wisconsin's second-string crew. Later at Henley Washington lost its race to Trud Kolomna, ending whatever small claim it had left to being first in the U.S.

Now Jablonic felt a twinge of anxiety as he waited for the semifinal race on the Thames with Northeastern. "Our practice was very mechanical, we weren't quite alive," he said. To perk up his oarsmen he was going to send his boat past the stands and have them hot dog it as they approached waiting Northeastern.

Northeastern Coach Ernie Arlett, who grew up in Henley and was spending his 61st birthday there, was doing his best to conceal a hard-won confidence. "May the better men win," he said the night before the Wisconsin race. "That's Northeastern. We're in a good fighting mood. If they beat us in these conditions, well, good luck to them. I'll take my hat off to 'em." But he did not look like a man who was about to doff his little black cap to anyone.

Old oars, rugged individualists and their fine-fashioned ladies cavorted by cycle, by antique spectator yacht and, ever so sedately, while anchored at one of Henley's numerous pubs.

Wisconsin has a reputation for running off fast and slowing up toward the finish. Northeastern planned to start faster still, dog the Badgers and then, if necessary, turn on its famous guts-out kick and finish off Wisconsin in the last 500 meters of the odd Thames course that measures one mile and 550 yards instead of the standard 2,000 meters.

The long slim Edwardian umpires' launch filled with officials and guests slid away, and a short while later the race began—then ended. Northeastern had false started, a planned false start as it turned out. "We needed to get the cobwebs out," explained Cox Frank Leahy.

There was a warning from the umpire and Northeastern got off cleanly the next time, striking, as they say at Henley, 44 before settling down to a smooth 38 by the Barrier 700 yards along. Instead of dogging Wisconsin, however, Northeastern was holding a short lead, but Wisconsin refused to quit and kept throwing power 20s at the Huskies.

Rowing in the lane nearer to the grandstand—known as Berks after the county, as opposed to Bucks, in which Wisconsin raced—Northeastern's lead had dwindled to a half length by the three-quarter-mile mark and its rate was only 34 to Wisconsin's 36. But then Northeastern let go and the lead began to grow again. At the finish line it had lengthened to the healthy margin of a boat.

"Wisco pushed the entire time," said Northeastern Captain Bill Backman after the shouting about No. 1 and finger-waving had died down. Just then a saddened Jablonic came by to wish the Northeastern crew luck the next day. "You rowed a great race," he told Backman warmly. "Now I want to see you guys pull it off against the Russians." He kept the disappointment from his voice.

Arlett was excited. Northeastern had lost in the finals last year and he was eagerly looking forward to at last getting a victor's dunking in his beloved Thames. But the Russians kept Arlett dry. For three days Soviet crews had suffered defeat after unexpected defeat. Now it was beat Northeastern or shovel salt.

Northeastern did the shoveling. "It was like pushing a stone wall down the river," groaned Backman. "We couldn't get the power on." But they could, at least, get the crown on—U.S. version, to be sure—and they will always be able to say, "We rowed at Henley."