

Open Letter to Marty Marion

# Sam's Song

By SAM PROCOPIO  
Collegian Sports Editor



Dear Mr. Marion:

We hope your face is not red. But it should be. You have been under fire with many baseball fans ever since you remarked early last May that Mickey Mantle is the "greatest player in baseball today." Even over Stan "The Man" Musial. Now that the regular major league season has been concluded we would like to bring to your attention the greatness "your player" has achieved.

The Yankee outfielder hit .295 this season. Sure the average is good. But is it the greatest? What do we call those players who hit above .295? There are at least ten in both leagues who hit better and some that do it quite consistently. In what category do we place them? Is there anything greater than greatest?

Mantle hasn't won a batting or fielding title since he came into the big leagues three years ago. Is that baseball's greatest? Even if he should win a title next year, it wouldn't prove much—except that he may begin to live up to what you call him.

Manager Eddie Stanky, who has defended Musial, complimented you when he said: "I think Mickey will be a .325 or .330 hitter and hit with good power like Jimmy Foxx. But I don't think he'll be the high average hitter who wins batting titles like Musial." Why, your greatest player hasn't come close to the aforementioned average.

We grant you that Mantle is the fastest player in both leagues to run down to first base. He does have power, too. But how can you place him above players who can do that and more. As far as power is concerned, why hit the ball 500 feet for a home run when a player can get the same hitting it somewhat over 300 feet? One long hit doesn't make him the greatest.

To combat your statement, Stanky gave you as good an answer we could think of when he said:

"In seven or eight years I may change my mind, but right now I'll string along with the fellow who has won six batting championships and is going for a seventh.

"Of course," Stanky continued, "some people may know more about baseball than I do. They may be able to look into the future and tell what's going to happen. I can't do that," Stanky said. "So, I'm stringing along on the basis of what has happened."

And what has happened would make Mantle look like a one-dimensional player.

Unlike Mantle, there is the fact that usually there is little fanfare when "Stan the Man" walks off with the overall mauling honors. As Ed Munday puts it: "He has done it with such regularity, and with such a lack of flamboyancy, that his tiptoe to the title has become almost as much of an annual event as the first presidential pitch of the season."

Mantle is a bad ball hitter—a strike against him as a great ball player. Musial isn't. The great outfielder of the Cardinals doesn't wait for perfect strikes, either. He has been satisfied when a pitcher gets the ball near the plate and has settled for many a left field hit—home runs at that.

As Frank Eck sees Musial: "Just watch him lean out sometime for an outside pitch—and notice how he's in that box score every day."

Tommy Henrich has praise for Musial too. "Add to Musial's batting average the fact that he'll play all three outfield positions as well as first base," the former Yankee said, "at the manager's convenience, and the Cardinals have the perfect team player."

You may say that there have been many praises written about Mantle, too. You bet there has. A great many. Too much, in fact. The only trouble is that he hasn't lived up to any of it yet.

We have seen Mantle and Musial play many times during the past two years. And if Musial's outstanding fielding averages don't convince you he is better, we suggest you read some of the game writeups. You may find it difficult at first. That is, because the great catches are not written in the lead of the story. But down near the end where they may be overlooked.

Every time the Cardinals get a well-pitched game they're a good bet to win it, no matter who is pitching for the other side. That's the edge Stan Musial gives them.

You have a right to your opinion, but next time, we believe, you should let the youngster prove himself. Look at the records. If you don't think they show anything, we would like to know what does. Opinions?

—30—

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### Sport Flashbacks . . .

# The Life of '38 X-Country Star Nearly Ended In Tragic Auto Mishap

By HERM WEISKOPF

An automobile accident in 1938 all but ended the career of Bill Smith, one of the best cross-country runners the Lions ever possessed.

The tragic event occurred when Smith was on his way home for Christmas vacation. The car in which he was riding collided head-on with a truck. Smith was hospitalized with a concussion and broken nose, ribs and shoulder. It was feared at first that he might not live. Although he fought his way back and continued to race, he was never the runner he had been.

#### Won IC4A Crown

Prior to the mishap Smith was the outstanding man on the Nittany hill-and-dale squad. As a freshman in 1937 he defeated Ray Trail of Syracuse, one of the top harriers at that time. During the same campaign he won the IC4A freshman cross-country title, the only event in the Intercollegiate in which freshman runners may compete.

In 1938 he paced the Lions to tremendous upset victories over strong Manhattan and Syracuse teams. On Nov. 14 of that year he won the IC4A cross-country crown as Penn State placed fifth.

#### Set New Record

Smith was called "Wild" Bill because of his temperament. His frail 5'7" frame belied his true strength and ability.

His greatness came to the fore when he told Nittany Track Coach Chick Werner that he had concocted a sure-fire plan to break the course record at the College. He explained that he planned to run the first two miles of the five-mile layout in approximately

nine minutes and then sprint the rest of the way. The scheme sounded incredible, but as Smith passed the two-mile mark his time was recorded as 9:42. He then proceeded to sprint the remaining distance and set a new Nittany mark of 25:24.

Even after his accident Smith was still a good runner. He has the distinction of never being beaten in a home meet. Only two men can claim that they defeated Smith in dual meet competition. They are Bob Fehr and the fabulous Les MacMitchell.



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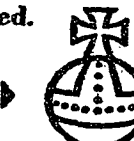
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