

# Vernacular of the Race Track

**E**SPERANTO, it is said, is making headway. But how many "average people" know five words of it? Is it imaginable that the breath of universal popularity can ever be breathed into any manufactured language which, according to the best information, is so rigid, fixed, unalterable, sedate, and proper that a pat-ter or a patois or a slang can never be evolved out of it?

It isn't possible to conceive of a baseball "fan" "rooting" in Esperanto, nor a "horse bug" Esperantist howling himself black in the face over a field of thoroughbreds turning into the stretch. It isn't possible either to conceive of the baseball "fan" or the "horse bug" giving up, for all the Esperantos that ever may be invented, the pat and illuminative phrases that they have already invented, devised, and chosen wherewith to express themselves.

Already we have transferred scores of these baseball and racing terms to the currency of our every day speech, and this sort of transplantation goes on unceasingly. Men who begin by using quite precise language involuntarily fall into the use of the patter when they become interested in either of the great American outdoor sports, baseball or racing.

Recently, meeting a friend just returned from the race track, I asked him what horse had won a certain race. "Dandelion, he win," was his offhand reply—and this man had taken honors at Harvard! No race track "regular," in talking it over, ever says that he "won" a bet. "I win a bet," is his way of twisting the tense about.

The slang of the baseball diamond probably is of wider currency than the patter of the paddock; because, for one reason, there are more Americans interested in baseball than there are in racing, and because again the patois of the baseball park is more readily understood than the quaintly picturesque lingo of the race track.

It would be possible for a man not familiar with racing patter to listen to a group of racing "regulars" "pony buzzing" for an entire evening without in the least understanding what they were talking about. American track slang differs wholly from the patter of the English tracks. It is keener, more picturesque, and more "nervous and alive," if, as may be, it is more difficult to understand. It is largely a language of paradoxes. It is humorously overdrawn. It is in sore need of a glossary, to which the compilation here to follow shall be a mere sketch or rough draft; for a glossary of racing slang would be an ample volume.

The terms of prophecy, in the patois of the track, are grotesquely exaggerated. Every horse in the race, except the one you are eloquently advised to back, is a "mutt," or a "crab," or a "dog," or a "skate," or a "goat," or a "camel," or a "piece o' cheese," or a "hunk o' Edam," or anything else that is inconsequential or ridiculous when coupled with the idea of racing.

## When He's Bound to Win

**A**ND it is not sufficient that the horse you are advised to bet on will win with absolute certainty. That horse will win with the most absurd ease.

"It'll be a joke."  
 He'll "walk in."  
 He'll "cop in a stroll."  
 He'll "win on the bit" or "on the chin strap."  
 He'll "go ay-way and hide from all o' them other dogs."  
 He'll "spread eagle them others."  
 He'll "trudge home all alone."  
 He'll "winsky as far as from here to the Rocky Mountains and back."  
 He'll "get the kale by the length of a Salt Lake block."  
 He'll "cop a noddin'."  
 He'll "grease home under reefed tops'ls."  
 He'll win "in the boy's [jockey's] lap."  
 "The kid on him'll be lookin' back an' laughin'."  
 The horse will "roll home."  
 The horse "could fall down and then win."  
 The jockey riding him "could get off and peddle matches, and then cop."  
 The extraordinary animal on which you are urged to gamble your money could "romp around the track twice to them others' once and smother 'em."  
 The "kid on him could go asleep and then fetch him home."  
 He'll "be pulled to the shape of a pretzel" at the finish, or "pulled to a doughnut," or "yanked double," or "hauled sideways," when the "tape" is reached.  
 He'll "make the Empire State Express look like a one-hoss shav."  
 He'll "make an ice yacht look like a treetoad navigatin' a dusty road."  
 He'll "tin-can all the way."  
 He'll "win off by himself."  
 He'll "run the eyeballs out o' them others."  
 He'll "cop from flag fall to finish."

He'll "tiptoe 'em out in front all the wayovitch."  
 He'll "be a kickin' pebbles at 'em all the way."  
 He "could win on three legs."  
 He could "carry a bale o' hay and a member of the Fat Men's Club and still win."  
 He'll "run rings around 'em."  
 He'll "tie 'em all in figure-o'-eight knots."  
 He'll "vamp down to the tape like a scared rabbit."  
 He'll "grab the spinach by a sixteenth of a mile."  
 "The others behind him'll finish next Tuesday week."  
 He'll "be in the barn, munchin' carrots, when they get in."

He'll "be cooled out and sound asleep in his stall, when them others reach the wire."

And finally, to clinch it, you are informed that this phenomenal thoroughbred is "in." "It's in," is the phrase. "It's in, the red board is down" (the red board confirms the numbers of the three placed horses), "and they're payin' off on him."

The casual racetrack visitor, uncertain as to what horse of the field he will "go to" (*i. e.*, gamble on), must be armored in a veritable Bessemer shell of incredulity to withstand the temptation to choose as his medium of speculation an animal of such prodigious speed and power as these rapidly rattled off phrases portray.

## But if He Loses

**T**HE favorite that fails to do the trick is consigned by those who have backed him to win to an unplumbed and fathomless abyss of scorn.

"He's a job," the disgruntled ones observe of the defeated favorite.

"He couldn't beat me little sister runnin' across the



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road in a game o' prisoner's base."

"He couldn't beat a steam roller goin' backward."  
 "He couldn't head a bull up a lane."  
 "He couldn't beat a fat man in a spud race."  
 "Him for the glue works."  
 "He couldn't beat a land crab goin' up grade."  
 "He's a lump o' Swiss."  
 "He's only a mornin' glory" (a "morning glory," in the turf vernacular, being a horse that "works great guns" when it comes to speed at his morning trials and fails dismally "when he goes to the races" in the afternoon).  
 "He can't run fast enough to keep himself warm."  
 "He's a phony and a four-flush and an in-and-outer" ("in-and-outer" being a horse of the "now you see it and now you don't" variety, which wins gallantly to-day, only to fall down most abhorrently to-morrow, thus lacking in consistency).  
 "He runs for the books" (a horse, that is to say, that the bookmakers can safely "lay against," knowing that they "have an ace under cover").  
 "He's a sucker horse" (a horse, namely, that only the "suckers" should back; and the chaps who say this after having backed the "sucker horse" wholly overlook the fact that they are including themselves under that heading).  
 "He ought to be hitched to a milk wagon."  
 "He couldn't beat a bum with a wooden prop [leg] in a sack sprint."  
 "He couldn't beat me old aunt goin' to mass."  
 "He was lookin' for a hole in the fence all the way."  
 "He wanted to lay down before he'd gone a furlong."  
 "He just seen that other horse come alongside and look him in the eye, and he said, 'You can have it.'"  
 "He couldn't beat a milch cow headin' for a crick."  
 "He's there with the saffron streak."  
 "He curled up like a caterpillar in front of a grate fire."  
 "He let 'em all pass him as if he was tied to a post."  
 "He couldn't raise enough of a lope to keep his hoofs from crackin'."

There is no middle verbal ground for the race follower. Everything must be expressed in terms that embody the

final degree of exaggeration. A horse that has accomplished a good trial or "work out" for a race is said to have done the trial distance "in nothing."

"He put down the mile, on the bit, an' just a-breezin', in nothin'," is the way the "railbird" expresses it; not, as might be supposed, with obvious enthusiasm, such as the remarkable purport of the statement would seem to call for, but in a perfectly cool and self controlled sort of way, as if he was stating a simple fact,—that the horse had traveled over the measured mile without consuming any time at all in doing it.

The great horse that, despite his greatness, is beaten in a noted stake race, is held to be not worth feeding by the user of this uncompromising, out and out kind of track patter. Once a "regular" remarked of the mighty Hermis, for whom sixty-five thousand dollars had been paid but a short time before, "He ain't worth eighty-five cents, and I wouldn't give that much for him if he was put under the hammer right now." Hermis had just lost a race by a nose, after being all but left at the post, and that was the answer. The horse that is the idol of to-day is the "cur" of to-morrow with the "regulars."

While the crack thoroughbred is in the enjoyment of a winning streak,—"deliverin' the goods" and "backin' up with the turnips,"—he is adverted to as a "Hindu" or a "Salvator" or a "Domino" (these references being to famous horses of the gone time); but just as soon as the acclaimed horse, staling off or weary of campaigning, begins to lose his races, the "hammerfest" of the followers of the game begins, and the shattered idol is a "cur" and a "bogus" and a "near horse," and his prowess was always exaggerated, and he "never had nothin' to beat," and "Sysonby could a made him look like a bone spavin'd Angora," and so on.

The cynicism of the "regulars" when their "picks" (the horses they select to win) don't "run to the dope" (when they fail to race up to their previous form), is expressed in many darkly suspicious phrases. If the complaining "regular" believes that the horse wasn't intended to win by his owner and trainer, he says, "The mutt wasn't meant, but was just out for work."—"They gave him a bran mash and a couple o' pails o' water before sending him to the post," he is likely to add. Or, of the horse that beat their pick, they will say, "He was so full of the hurry up soup that it ran out o' his ears" (the hurry up soup is the "hop," otherwise speed accelerating drugs, with which some venal trainers "dope" their horses before sending them to the post in order to increase their chances of success).

## Hard on the Jockey

**I**F the jockey falls under the suspicion of the "regulars," they say of him, "I guess he's not there with the strong arm, hey?" and "D'je git hep to that Sandow biceps

gag he rung in?" which, interpreted, means, "Did you notice how he employed his Sandow biceps to pull that horse?" They'll say of the suspected jockey that he "took the mutt into a million pockets, went to the outside, got hung on the fence by the other crabs nine times, had to go around horses, and even then his horse was climbin' over horses at the finish an' couldn't a lost if the kid hadn't grabbed him from the tap o' the gong."

The incompetent jockey is alluded to as somebody who "couldn't ride in a furniture van."

The starter himself, one of the most powerful of active race track officials, comes in for his share of criticism, when by chance he sends a field away to a ragged start. "Start horses? He couldn't start trolley cars!" the angry mob bawls of him, and they go so far as to intimate that "I guess maybe that starter didn't have a ticket in his boot on that job he sent away in front, hey?" meaning the quite impossible thing that the starter had gambled on the animal that accidentally beat the barrier and flashed into the lead from the lighting of the webbing.

Most of the "regulars" are deeply suspicious of all steeplechase races of late years, and, whenever the favorite falls at one of the obstacles and a long priced leaper wins the race, they loudly call the race a "shoo-in" (a fixed affair, that is, in which the steeplechase riders have arranged to drop to the rear of the "meant" jumper and "shoo" him to the wire, they previously, of course, having got their money down on the horse thus generously treated).

Involuntarily the turf writers themselves in time begin to employ curiously exaggerated terms in their daily accounts of the racing. When, for instance, they wish to say that the track on the previous day was muddy, they write that "the track was knee deep in mud," an obvious impossibility, since race horses would be mired before taking ten steps in such going; or that "the track was a swamp, a morass, a sea of mud"; or, if the track was dry and dusty, they say that "the track was as hard as iron, and a Sahara simoon blowing across it all the afternoon made it still harder."

The patter of the betting ring is equally esoteric, exaggerated, and difficult for the novice to understand. When a bookmaker "rubs," he reduces the price