

## SPORTS

by Meyer Harris

Maybe in the beginning, sports, i.e. physical activity of a competitive nature in a given exercise, was a fun thing. My two experiences were one bad and one good. Because of my height I was encouraged in high school to come to basketball practice. Basketball is a game that calls for cooperation between the five players who are actively engaged on the court during the action. I am sure everyone here is familiar with the game. All went well until the first game. As opportunities presented themselves to me I took shots at the basket. The coach pulled me off the court and I sat the rest of the game on the bench. After the game the coach took me aside and asked me if I knew why he benched me. I said no. "Well," he said, "you were there to retrieve the ball and feed it to Johnny who is the shooter on the team, you are not to take shots at the basket." Well I never showed up for another practice or game. Not my idea of what I thought the game should be, develop one player to do nothing but shoot baskets, and everyone else there just to feed him.

My second encounter was a little different, I was asked to come out for the swim team. The coach asked what I thought I could do. I replied, "I swim." He then asked what strokes I could do well. I replied, "Why don't you tell me what you want me to do?" So I gave a presentation, first the crawl, then the back stroke, followed by the breast stroke. After that he stopped me and said, "Your specialty will be the breast stroke, your long legs really give you a good frog kick." Here I did not have to feed a glory hungry shooter. I raced against the clock, my efforts were my rewards and the team benefited from my efforts. My rewards were the seconds I shaved off the clock. I was not the most outstanding swimmer, but I took some seconds and thirds, even on occasion a first, adding points to the overall scores. The most important thing about my swimming career was that I reaped the benefits of my efforts first, and the team second.

Many years later after I married and settled in a small rural community, I became a mentor for a young man. When he entered high school he and I would talk and he said that he was not happy. He lived outside of town and wanted to play football, but because he was unable to attend team practice, it was ruled out. However he wanted something after his name in the graduation year book. "I can not think of anything that I could do that does not require team practice." I asked him if the high school had a track team. "Yes" he replied.

"So go out for track. Do you know how to run?"

"Sure, but what do I do?"

"From your house to the high school is approximately two miles and you take the bus to school. Well. get up one hour earlier and forget the bus, start out with a scout pace, fifty steps walking, fifty steps running, little by little increase the running and in no time you will be running all the way. Then go to the coach and tell him that you want on the track team as a long distance runner. He did as I suggested and became the 440 and 220 runner for the high school track team. He won most of his races, and when he graduated, below his picture in the graduation year book it said "Long distance runner and 440 and 220 winner of ten of twelve events last season." It also helped him get accepted to Rutgers University, from which he graduated with an engineering degree, and as a member of the track team.