Frank Gotch at His Favorite Sport.

Frank Gotch vs. The World
A Glance at the Peculiar Situation in Wrestling Circles.
The Peerless Champion and His Probable Successor

By F. C. LANE

The wrestling game in America is in a chaotic state, wavering between the popularity which it so richly deserves and the uncertainty resulting from harsh and exaggerated criticism. Every loyal American may well feel proud that one of his own countrymen is undisputed champion of the world, but mere patriotism however worthy should never dim that fairminded appreciation of foreign rivals which is so essential a part of all true sportsmanship.

The situation in the wrestling world just now is of peculiar interest. At the supreme head of the Sport is Frank Gotch, the acknowledged and undisputed champion of the world, whose surpassing abilities have placed him clearly above and beyond all possible competitors. But Gotch has declared that he has wrestled his last bout, and as far as any champion can do, has
resigned, so that his high position would logically seem to fall to his most worthy successor.

In this respect, wrestling is in much the same predicament as boxing. The search of years has failed to reveal any worthy opponent to Jack Johnson, and his numerous declarations of retirement have been about as frequent as have those of Gotch. As a matter of fact, neither man probably has any intention whatsoever of retiring so long as he has his health and strength, and so long as there is any prospect of good money to be made in his particular profession.

There is one great difference, however, between the situation in wrestling and boxing. The glove contest is the same wherever the sport exists. The wrestling world, however, is divided into two warring camps. The standard method, the old Greco-Roman style, which is still pre-eminent in every country in Europe, has developed on this side of the Atlantic, a worthy offshoot, known as the "catch-as-catch-can" style. This style, which has enjoyed a great popularity in this country, and has become recognized as the great American form of wrestling, depends largely on skill, quickness and trickiness. It is more spectacular than its older rival, more fitted for the temperament of the people among whom it has become so popular.

The Greco-Roman style, on the other hand, is the logical descendant of the classic wrestling at one time prevalent among the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is slower, more ponderous, and depends more on sheer strength and weight.

Gotch is almost an ideal "catch-as-catch-can" wrestler. To be sure, he is a large man, and heavy, but he has sacrificed muscular development always to speed. He has tremendous strength, particularly in his hands and forearms, but above all, he is quick and tricky. He is beyond question the fastest man of his size in the wrestling game to-day, and his well trained mind is ever alert and ready to take sudden and unexpected advantage of his opponent. In his own particular style he has proved himself immeasurably superior to his European antagonists, who found themselves in a new country, amid strange surroundings, without adequate knowledge of the wrestling game, as played here, and handicapped by their own excessive weight and slow moving muscles.

It has been the peculiar privilege of Gotch to contest the supremacy of the world on his own soil, and at his own particular style of wrestling. Here he had his opponents at a great disadvantage, which they have not in any case been able to overcome. Had he competed on foreign soil, and, above all, had he been obliged to subscribe to the rules which govern this great pastime there, it is more than an open question if he would now be the undisputed champion of the world.

A feature of the wrestling game in recent years, which involves Gotch's brilliant achievements, has been the attitude of the American public toward his competitors. These men comprise the leading wrestlers in Europe, where the game has become more popular than it ever was in America, but have still been dubbed "Cheese" champions, and "Lemons" by sporting writers all over this country. These charges have been based on their showing with Gotch, where they were certainly at a decided disadvantage, and as certainly failed in every case to match up very evenly with the champion. But these same writers have failed to take into consideration all the circumstances of the case, and their criticisms, founded as they have been on injustice and short-sightedness, have done the sport a tremendous amount of injury.

This adverse criticism which has come to be an aftermath to every success of the peerless champion, found a fitting climax after the now celebrated occurrence on last Labor Day. There has been nothing more senseless in recent sporting history than the wholesale denunciation of Hackenschmidt, which followed that event.

So far as actual achievement goes, Hackenschmidt had as good a record as Gotch himself. He had been absolutely invincible in his own country. He had on a former visit thrown the best wrestlers in the United States in record time. He had wrestled Gotch himself to a standstill on the memorable occasion when they first met, when he lost the
championship of the world by default.

Hackenschmidt was not, nor ever could be, a typical "catch-as-catch-can" wrestler. He was too muscular and slow. In his own style, the Graeco-Roman, he was a past master, but he was forced to compete with one of the trickiest athletes who ever entered the ring, at his own special style and on his own soil.

Hackenschmidt has been criticized for showing what has been assumed to be a quitter's attitude. As a matter of fact, I have been told on very good authority that he was not in proper shape for a bout on that date. Be that as it may, Hackenschmidt's temperament is not that of a typical scrapper. He is a quiet, reserved and fair-minded man, who himself disliked to resort to those tricks of the game, perfectly allowable, but nevertheless, hardly sportsmanlike, which Gotch and various other American champions have resorted to habitually.

When he saw himself fairly outclassed, and knew that the struggle was hopeless, he merely resigned himself to the inevitable. This perhaps is not the typical American attitude in a case of this kind, but it was the one attitude to be expected from Hackenschmidt, with his quiet, serious temperament.

The method of obtaining a record in Europe is far different than in the United States. There the tournaments which are held at Berlin, Paris, and various other large cities, are a feature of the wrestling game, which develop those stars who later invade our own shores.
thrown the best men who have gathered for that particular contest.

It is certainly a tremendous athletic feat for a wrestler to go through one of these tournaments successfully, where he is matched with the leading wrestlers of his own country and all Europe, and the winners of these events have invariably proved to be men of tremendous muscular development and strength.

Having won a tournament, and established a reputation at home, these athletes turn invariably to America, which is the land of big fortunes and glittering prizes. They come here usually wholly unprepared for the style of wrestling, which prevails in this country, and it is not surprising that they fail when they meet the surpassing skill and science of such a man as Gotch.

There is no attempt in this article to belittle Gotch's wonderful record in any way. He is probably the greatest all-around wrestler who has ever won a trophy on the mat in recent generations, but, to be fair, we must admit that his opponents are not "has-beens" as the hostile press would have us think, for they are sterling wrestlers of their own particular style, as great as those of any era in the history of the sport. They are simply outclassed by a new system to which they are not trained—in a new environment to which they are not accustomed.

The situation at present is in large measure unfortunate. So long as Gotch remains actively in the ring, it is difficult to see a logical contender for the title. At the same time, to be perfectly sportsmanlike, he should clearly define his own attitude, so that the public may believe him sincere, in his retirement, or else condescend to meet the leading wrestlers who come to these shores with a sufficient reputation to warrant such a meeting.

It has been the divine right of champions for centuries to choose their own contestants for the title. It has been left entirely to the title holder both in boxing and wrestling, to wrestle or fight, as the case may be, only with whom he pleases. He has in this way had the opportunity of side-stepping many good men, who have been barred from contesting for the title, where their efforts might well have been crowned with success.

The public never knows the inside workings of much that is imperfectly revealed in the press, and it may be that Champion Gotch has every reason for his apparent unwillingness to meet Zybszco. It may be that he is perfectly sincere in resigning his title to Mahmout, but if so, he is hardly fair according to the records, for Zybszco has thrown Mahmout on two occasions. Zybszco has further signified his willingness to meet Gotch at any time, and the $10,000 guarantee put up by his manager would seem to an outsider sufficient bait to attract even Gotch. It is true that Gotch threw Zybszco in record time at his last meeting, but it is also true that he resorted to a trick which is hardly sportsmanlike in obtaining the first fall, and the entire bewilderment which Zybszco naturally underwent as the result of the trick accounted in a large measure for the quickness of the second fall.

It is well to remember that Zybszco defeated Gotch in a handicap match when the champion proved unable to throw the gigantic Pole within the hour agreed upon.

At present there are five wrestlers in this country who have proved themselves supreme at home and have won reputations abroad. These five champions come from five different countries, and are all typical Græco-Roman wrestlers of the old school. Zybszco is the best known of these wrestlers, and so far as present records go, has established clearly the right to challenge the champion.

Stanislaus Zybszco is a Galician Pole. He is a man of high education, speaks several languages, and is extremely well informed. He is a tremendously muscular man, and usually weighs when in wrestling trim about 245 pounds.

Yousil Mahmout is a typical Græco-Roman wrestler, and also a tremendously muscular and very heavy athlete. He has won Gotch's esteem more than any of his other rivals, and although he has proved an indifferent match for Gotch, he has been rewarded with the mantle of the retiring American champion.

Ivan Romanoff, the huge Cossack of southern Russia, is particularly conspicuous on account of his great height. Al-
though he is six feet eight inches tall, his great stature is not conspicuous unless he be standing near some other person, as he is so well proportioned. Romanoff weighs when in condition 280 pounds, and on account of his great strength and weight, is a formidable antagonist for anyone.

Giovanni Raicevitch is a native of Pisa, Italy. He weighs when in condition 240 pounds, and is not very tall, only about five feet eight inches. He has a tremendously developed chest and shoulders.

Raicevitch’s recent bout with Zybszcko was not very satisfactory, and a return match will doubtless be necessary to settle the supremacy between these two athletes.

Jess Pedersen, the fifth and least known of this foreign quintet, is a Scandinavian, and hails from Denmark. He is also a tremendously heavy man, weighing about 250 pounds, and seems disposed to meet any other athlete in this country, particularly Gotch himself.

The problem of Gotch’s successor is a complicated one. There is probably no champion in sight at present who could beat him at his own game. But his increasing age is an antagonist which no champion can long withstand and Gotch has already passed his fighting prime. Then, too, he is a comparatively wealthy and well-educated man with family ties. He has a number of inducements which urge him away from the mat with its strife and care. He has accumulated a comfortable fortune as an athlete. He can retire with full laurels, peerless and undefeated.

And who will be the champion, then? Hackenschmidt will probably not again revisit these shores. His star has set. All the other leading wrestlers of Europe are here. Some one of this formidable five will inherit the supreme title. For outside of Gotch there is not another native wrestler in America who seems able to win or retain the championship of the world.