



© 1965 LOS ANGELES TIMES

## **JIM MURRAY**

# Let Golf Decide

Any discussion of natural athletes in our times usually begins and ends with John Roosevelt Robinson, the well-known introvert from Stamford, Conn.

You name it, and Jackie excelled in it. He might have been a popoff, but never a pop-up. And I note in the public prints where Jackie, along with Tommy Harmon, another outstanding tonsilist of our time, made Sports Illustrated's Silver Anniversary All-America squad—an elite group of ex-footballers who kept right on scoring in life even after the cheering sections (and the blockers) were removed.

It's a fine way to measure the man, but it's measuring the athlete we're interested in. Robinson looms largest because he excelled not only in track, basketball and football, but already is a Hall of Fame baseball player. Harmon was pretty much a one-purpose athlete. He did what he did with a football.

Only Jim Thorpe is in the hunt with Robinson when it comes to the perennial and inconclusive search for the elusive "greatest." Thorpe foundered on a piece of white man's duplicity known as the curve ball or Jackie might just be a close second.

I don't know where you'd rate William Walton Sharman, the gunner from the Boston Garden, the swisher from the San Joaquin, but I say no worse than fifth. Bill Sharman, like Stanford's Jackie Douglas, added tennis to his list of super-proficiencies. I imagine Jackie Robinson would have found tennis no insurmountable challenge, but he came along in a day when it wasn't only the uniforms that had to be white.

### ***National Tourney in Tennis***

Sharman, who also threw the shot and the discus, ran the hurdles and tinkered with the javelin in high school, went as far as the national junior tournament in tennis. Usually, only career tennisists go that high. Next stop: Davis Cup.

But Sharman's genius was throwing a bloated leather basketball through an orifice barely wide enough for the purpose from ranges where most people would be lucky to hit the backboard. That was his genius, but not his only talent. He was also a fence-busting batter for USC in the post-war 40's, and the Brooklyn Dodgers—who already had Jackie Robinson and a lock on a half-dozen pennants—shelled out important money for him in 1950.

Bill was an outfielder, and all he had to beat out to get his own start on the Hall of Fame was Duke Snider, or Andy Pafko, or Carl Furillo—or, on occasion, Jackie Robinson himself. Babe Ruth might have been platoonned in that outfit.

Sharman batted .298 in the high minors, Buzzie Bavasi turned down \$50,000 for him from Washington, and Sharm joined the team in September of 1951. "As soon as we clinch the pennant, you'll get a chance to play," Bavasi promised him.

### ***Kicked Out, Never Played***

Brooklyn clinched the pennant in September 1952, as it happens,—1951, you will recall, was the year Bobby Thomson hit THE home run and Bill Sharman was not only sitting on the bench that day, he was also sitting there the other day Brooklyn lost the pennant—the day in Boston when a Brave's runner was called safe at the plate and umpire Frank Dascoli cleared the Brooklyn bench out of the game.

Among them was Bill Sharman, who hadn't opened his mouth but who thus earned the distinction of having been thrown out of a major league game but never having played in one.

It was on that trip that another sure appraisor of

**Please Turn to Pg. 3, Col. 1**

# MURRAY'S COLUMN

Continued from First Page

natural athletic ability stepped into the picture. Arnold Auerbach, that subtle old flatterer of the Boston Celtics, invited Sharman to shoot some baskets at practice.

In his street shoes and with his tie on, Sharman out-shot most of the guards the Celts had. It was a lot easier outfield to break into, and Sharman went on to become the deadliest shooter in that game—and probably the deadliest 6-foot 1-inch shooter it will ever see.

I ran into Bill Sharman at the Olympian Motel on Olympic Blvd. the other day, where Bill was shopping around for photographs of his new Palm Desert Golf Club, of which he is general manager.

The talk got around to all-around athletic ability, to Robinson, Thorpe and others and it was pointed out, that, of all athletes from other sports who tried it, golf eluded most. Only Sammy Byrd, a second-string Yankee outfielder, and Bill Ezinicki, a big-league hockey player, ever took tournaments. It was noted that not even Jackie Robinson himself could surround golf.

"That's right," allowed Sharman. "I always thought I was a natural athlete 'til I took up golf. It's the equalizer, the humbler. It's one game from tee to apron, and then something else. It's like poker and bridge at the same time."

The solution, then, is simple. To secure the "greatest" beyond doubt, we now, to the decathlon, add nine holes of golf. It's no longer enough to be able to break off the curve, catch the ball over your shoulder, break stopwatches or jaws, or fences—you have to be able also to sink that nine-foot, curling, downhill putt. Golfers may not be athletes, but it appears to be the one sport where the opposite is equally true.