



RETRIEVING IN BACKCOURT, CHAMPION JACOBS (NEAREST CAMERA) SETS FOR BALL AS WARY DEFENDER SLOAN WAITS UP FRONT

## FOUR WALL AND FOR BLOOD

**Jimmy Jacobs won the U.S. handball championship last week, but not without a marvelous, slam-bang fight**

by **ROBERT BOYLE**

**F**RANCIS is a gorilla, now deceased, who once lived in Chicago. Francis is also the name given to Jimmy Jacobs, a 29-year-old four-wall handball player from Los Angeles, by Johnny Sloan, a 24-year-old Chicagoan. Last week the two of them met at the San Francisco Olympic Club in the finals of the annual championships of the United States Handball Association.

"Francis" Jacobs won, and his success story should gainfully instruct anybody who has ever cared about sport.

A total of 242 players entered the tournament, 88 in singles and 154 in doubles and masters doubles. Jacobs and Sloan were expected to be the

best, but there were few in the packed final-day gallery of 175 who would volunteer to pick the winner. Jacobs won the singles title in 1955, '56 and '57, he defaulted to Sloan the next year because of a torn back muscle (incurred when Sloan slammed into him during a doubles match), and he was unable to play last year because of a circulatory ailment. A few weeks ago, Jacobs showed he was back to form when he beat Sloan in a tournament in Minneapolis.

Sloan and Jacobs are a study in contrasts. Recently discharged from the Army, Sloan is a crew-cut blond son of a choirmaster who approaches the sport with a deceptively casual air. He does not follow a strict training

program, not even during a tournament. If he feels like going to bed at 2 in the morning, he'll go to bed at 2 in the morning, which is just what he did one night last week. He likes to relax with the boys over a couple of highballs, and his ambition is to own a cocktail lounge. A bachelor, Sloan has the reputation of being the Romeo of handballers.

On the court, Sloan is a tough competitor who plays it cool. He has tremendous accuracy, but he is unlikely to overpower an opponent. "You can always assume that when Sloan is on the court, he brings his mind along," says Jacobs. "He is not only a handball player, but a thinker."

Jacobs, on the other hand, likes to leave his thinking outside the court. He writes admonishing notes to himself. ("Don't try to knock down the front wall, kiddo"), and he memorizes them before he plays. "I don't rely on my judgment in the court," Jacobs says, "because too many times I've made decisions that haven't been accurate. For five years I've been writing notes to myself. I've made the decision before the calamity arises."

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As Jacobs says this, his brown eyes smolder with intensity. A powerful, seemingly tireless player, Jacobs is 5 feet 9 and a well-muscled 185. He moves so swiftly and stops so suddenly on the court his sneakers sound like the squealing brakes of a car going 80.

Early last week it became obvious that Jacobs and Sloan would be the singles finalists. On Wednesday, they met in the doubles semifinals, and what happened then almost had an effect on the singles. Sloan and Phil Collins, the defending doubles champions, were playing against Jacobs and Dick Weisman when Sloan charged into Jacobs and knocked him flying. Jacobs picked himself up, and he and Weisman went on to win in an upset. But Jacobs left the court with a bruised hip muscle, and he had to take whirlpool baths and cortisone shots the rest of the week.

Losing in the doubles was a break for Sloan. When he and Collins played their consolation doubles match on Friday, the day before the singles final, he took it easy while Collins did the playing. However, Jacobs had to extend himself that same day when he and Weisman played Vic Hershkowitz and Morrie Singer in the doubles final. Jacobs and Weisman lost the first game 5-21, and were only six points from total disaster in the second game when Jacobs really gambled. Down by the horrendous margin of 15-3, Jacobs told Weisman, in effect, to let him play singles. With that, Jacobs roared back to win the game 21-16, and he and Weisman took the third game, and the title, by a 21-9 score. It was a fantastic display, and everyone wondered if Jacobs would have enough left for Sloan the next day.

On Saturday afternoon a bushed Jacobs and a relatively rested Sloan came on the court. As usual, Jacobs had plotted his strategy in advance. He planned to keep the ball in play "to get Sloan as tired as I was." Jacobs opened service and scored three points with a pass on the left of Sloan, a front-wall kill off the back wall and a Sloan error on a ceiling shot. Jacobs erred on a right-hand shot, and Sloan took the service. He aced Jacobs to the right, scored on a front-wall kill off a ceiling shot, aced again, scored on Jacobs' left-hand er-

ror and passed on the left for five points before Jacobs won back the service. The lead moved back and forth. With the score 11-9, Sloan knocked Jacobs to the floor trying to get a hinder ball. The gallery gasped, but Jacobs shook it off. At 12-all, Sloan began to move with kills and passes. He had marvelous control of the ball, and he took the game 21-13.

The second game was it for Jacobs. He had to win. With the score 11-10 his favor, he began to open up on Sloan, who, surprisingly, was the one who was tiring. Instead of running Sloan, he began going for the kill off the front wall, and he moved the score to 15-10. He pushed it to 18-10 on a bad bounce, a pass on the left and a pass on the right. He aced to

Sloan edged back. For a while it seemed neither of them could do anything. With the score 17-15 in favor of Jacobs, they traded service seven times on errors. Both seemed dead on their feet. Jacobs took a time-out and towed off his sweat. They had been playing for three hours. But three more minutes were all Jacobs needed. After resuming play, he went ahead 19-15, and Sloan took a time-out. Playing again, Jacobs moved to 20 on a hot one that caught Sloan's middle. Sloan wiped his forehead with his arm and awaited the next serve. It was short. Sloan had a momentary reprieve. Jacobs lobbed the next one over the line, and Sloan returned. Suddenly Jacobs caught Sloan up front. With a mighty slam

### BIG MAN BEHIND HANDBALL

Robert H. Kendler, president of the United States Handball Association, is a 55-year-old Chicago millionaire who owns Community Builders, the largest home-remodeling firm in the country. Kendler is so enamored of four-wall handball that he has a stable of players working for his firm (both Jacobs and Sloan once worked for Kendler), and he says that if he ever drops dead in a game it will take the undertaker three days to wipe the smile off his face. When Kendler misses a workout, he can't sleep. "To me," he says, "it is a therapy."



Ten years ago Kendler and his friends feared for the future of handball. "The game," Kendler says, "had gotten to the point where it was an orphan of the AAU." He organized the USHA, revised its rules, standardized the court (20 feet wide, 40 feet long and 20 feet high) and promoted intercollegiate competition. Except in New York City, where the Department of Parks is putting up three-wall courts so the police can keep a watchful eye on juvenile delinquents, four-wall handball is staging a strong and therapeutic comeback.

the left for 19, passed to the left for 20 and passed to the right for the game.

Before the deciding third game, Sloan took oxygen and came out fresh. He took the service from Jacobs, and before anyone could believe it, he knocked off eight straight points, mostly on devastating kills and aces. There was nothing Jacobs could do. He took the service, but lost it promptly as Sloan slammed a front-wall kill. After three straight points by Jacobs, Sloan ran the score to 10-3. Then back came Jacobs. He got the service on a front-wall kill. It took some time, but he kept killing and then he tied the score at 10-10. As the gallery whooped it up, Jacobs went ahead 16-10 on kills and passes. It was the *Perils of Pauline* all over again.

of his right arm, he sent the ball blasting off the front wall. Sloan watched it rocket past him on the left. Even fresh, Sloan probably never would have caught up with that one. Jacobs slumped on the floor, his back against the wall, a worn smile on his face.

In the locker room, Jacobs explained that he had to alter his style in the third game because of leg cramps. "My legs were tired," he said. "I had no choice, so I had to kill. He's a great player, and I'm lucky to get out of here alive." Across the street in a bar Sloan accepted fate with a Cutty Sark. "The guy," he said, "is a powerhouse. He just keeps plugging until he wears you down." He enjoyed his drink, reflecting that not even a gorilla could take that from him. **END**