

# Smokey Harper Retires

By MAYNARD ROGERS  
Sports Editor

Anyone who has been in and around sports for over 51 years has bound to have accumulated a lot of friends, experiences and memories that add up to something of a legend in athletic annals.

Charles (Smokey) Harper, veteran Aggie trainer, teacher and athletic psychologist, is such a man.

But, like in every person's life that works for a living, there comes a time when you take those memories and experiences, quit working and settle back to a well-deserved life of ease.

So, after a colorful and rewarding career on the playing field, in the dressing room and around the training table, the 66-year-old white-haired gentleman of the tape and liniment is retiring.

Harper will leave Aggieland on June 2, and head back to his old stomping grounds in Alabama after 10 years service with A&M athletic teams.

Reports are that he has a semi-retirement job with his old boss, Paul (Bear) Bryant, at Alabama University, in Tuscaloosa.

When he and his wife pull out of Bryan, Smokey will be hauling a mindload of remembrances of an athletic career that began when he was 15 years old—a career that took him to the top.

Of course, the many friends he claimed during his stay at Aggieland won't have him, except in their memories.

Smokey, as just about every coach and sports writer in Texas knows him, has been around a long time, and the athletic knowledge he has collected during his golden years in sports would even make Dr. Joyce Brothers flinch.

Harper was born just one day ahead of the New Year in 1898, in Milledgeville, Ga., but he started his journey through the sports world in Macon, about 30 miles away.

He began his formal athletic training at the local secondary institution, Lanier High School, playing football, basketball and baseball, with the diamond his best field.

As a matter of fact, baseball was indirectly responsible for his handle, Smokey.

"I was just a kid of 15 when it happened," Harper said. "I was playing on the high school baseball team for Macon, and we went to Milledgeville for a game. Well, since we were so far from home we thought we were pretty big, so we all bought the biggest cigars we could find, lit them up and started strutting around the Georgia State College For Women, there in Milledgeville. It was quite a day for me. I was wearing my first pair of long pants."

A big day it was until Harper remembered that his aunt taught at the Milledgeville school. Suddenly he saw her turn a corner and walk toward him.

"I couldn't let her see the cigar, but there was no time to put it out. So I stuck it in the back pocket of my new pants. We stood there and talked a few minutes. By the time she left my pants were on fire. After that, all my friends called me 'Smokey.'"

After high school Smokey at-

tended Mercer University in Macon, where he played basketball and baseball. It was there he picked up the knack of wrapping ankles and giving rubdowns.

Harper took his first training job at Clemson in 1926, and from there he began his hopscoching tour that carried him from one coast to the other.

After the stint with the Tigers, Smokey made more moves than a nervous checker player.

From Clemson he went to Vanderbilt, then to Florida, back to Vanderbilt, over to Alabama and another bounce back to the Vandies.

Next was the long haul to California to work with the immortal Red Sanders at UCLA.

After the Los Angeles job, Smokey headed for Kentucky, who was building up a football power under the direction of a guy named Bear Bryant. And that's where he stayed until he followed the Bear to Aggieland in 1954.

Throughout his career as a trainer who was pretty close to the athletes, Smokey is a renowned judge of player and character. But one time he says he was really wrong.

"That was back in 1950 when I first came to Kentucky for the Bear," Smokey explained. "I saw this sophomore kid, Ray Corral, who I didn't think had what it takes, so I told Bear to run him off. Well, Bear said he was sorry to hear that because he thought he was a good prospect."

As it turned out, the Bear knew something that Smokey didn't know, and Corral did everything the trainer thought he couldn't do.

"Bryant didn't tell me the boy was redshirting and was just fooling around," Harper said. "Anyway, he went on to make All-American at guard his senior year."

"I'll never forget that because when I told Bear to run Corral off Connie Lasslie, one of the line coaches said 'Smokey, I'm glad you told Paul that because I've been trying to run him off for a year, but he wouldn't do it. Maybe this will verify my judgement on him,'" Smokey laughed.

"Well, two years later," Harper continued. "Corral came back for a visit and Connie shook his hand, congratulated him and told him he knew he could do it. But I said, 'Connie, you're a liar. You wanted to run him off just like me.' Ol' Ray sure laughed about that."

Smokey branched out into a new field when he came to Aggieland. He started teaching students to be trainers, and since then the state is being scattered with Harper-taught men.

"Right now," Smokey commented, "Jerry Rhea is out in Odessa, Billy Pichert is working in Freeport and Jerry Elledge is in Kansas City. All those boys are Aggies, and everyone of them is an officer in the Southwest Athletic Trainers Association. Roy Don Wilson's my last boy. He's still here at A&M. I think he will make one of the greatest."

That prediction cannot be far from wrong, especially when the teacher is a man who has pampered and trained 13 All-America gridders during his 38 years in the business.

Some of the men who entered the portals of Smokey's training

# Randy, Ted Try Olympic Berths

Three Texas Aggies — Danny Roberts, Ted Nelson and Randy Matson — still have a lot of track action before them.

Roberts, leading shot putter among the nation's collegians this year with throw of 60-7, plans to concentrate on lifting weights in preparation for the NCAA championships June 18-19 in Eugene, Oregon.

Nelson, who leads the nation's collegians in the 440-yard dash with his 46.5, will compete in the

Coliseum Relays at Los Angeles this week Friday, the U. S. Federation meet at Corvallis, Ore. June 12-13, the NCAA at Eugene, Ore., June 18-19 and the National AAU June 26-27 at New Brunswick, N. J.

Matson, top weightman among the college freshman (and most of the rest of the world), has a busy schedule facing him as he prepares to make a strong bid as a shot putter on the U. S. Olympic squad.

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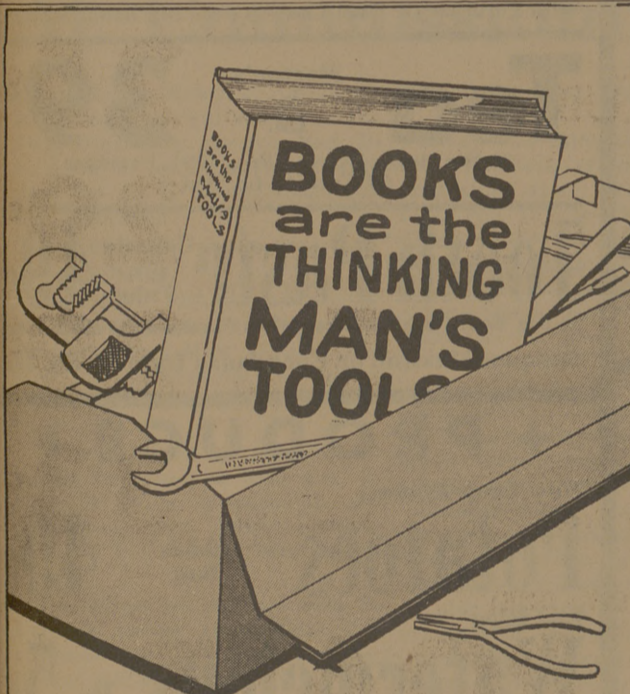
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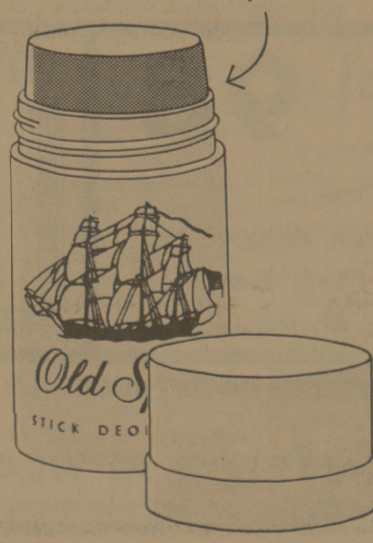
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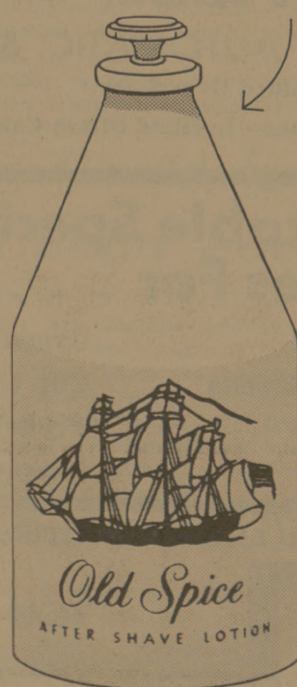
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