

MAC MITCHELL IS AT IT AGAIN!

Back from the Navy, this track star is now setting his sights on a fabled target . . . the four-minute mile

By GILBERT COSTA

NOW that Leslie MacMitchell is running again, the United States stands a good chance of regaining the track spotlight which was focused on Sweden during the war years.

This native New Yorker, who was the country's best miler before he entered the Navy in 1942, once more has the fans buzzing about a four-minute mile.

Leslie, of course, will need additional time and training before we can expect him to tear off mile runs equal to those of the two gentlemen from across the ocean, Gundar Hagg and Arne Andersson. But if anyone is going to match the speed of the "Swede Twins" within the next few seasons, it will be MacMitchell.

On February 27, 1937, when he was sixteen, Leslie MacMitchell showed that he would bear watching in years to come with a smashing performance at Madison Square Garden. Competing in the National High and



Les MacMitchell, the pupil and Emil Von Elling, the teacher.

Prep School championships for George Washington High School of New York City, Leslie won the mile by 60 yards in the incredible time of 4:23.6. It was the fastest indoor schoolboy mile ever run. Since then, that mark has been bettered only once.

Thirteen months later, Leslie MacMitchell was running his last scholastic race, and the speedboy set a blistering pace for the first three quarters. MacMitchell was out in front by 50 yards. But could he better his own mark? The gun cracked for the eighth and last lap.

Leslie turned on his sprint and the clockers waited for him to break the tape. Five minutes later, the announcer said, "The time and new world's record . . ." The roar of the fans drowned out the announcement of the time. In the official book it is listed as 4.22.2 and it looks as though it will stand for a long time.

As soon as Leslie MacMitchell entered New York University, he started breaking records. On May 13, 1939, he cracked the mile and half-mile frosh records. In fact, his time for the mile was two and a half seconds faster than that made in the varsity race. Track enthusiasts at NYU couldn't wait for MacMitchell's freshman year to pass.

When MacMitchell reported to varsity coach Emil Von Elling

the following year, a combination was begun that was to blaze a name in college competition throughout the country.

Von Elling knew MacMitchell was good. But he knew he could be better. And although Les couldn't help realizing his own ability, never, in all this time, did he think he was too big for his track shoes. Whenever the coach offered suggestions or advice, MacMitchell was quick to heed.

It was not uncommon to see MacMitchell's name in the headlines for a sterling performance at Madison Square Garden in a mile run one week, and then to learn from the back pages of another sport section that he had won a five-mile race in Hoboken the week after. There was hardly any event in which Les didn't compete while at NYU. And there was scarcely a time when he was defeated in any of them.

In his junior year, Leslie MacMitchell had his closest race. February 15, 1941, was the date, and the occasion was the annual Baxter Mile at Madison Square Garden before 14,000.

The fans rose in their seats as the two leaders came around the last turn. With fifty yards to go, Leslie MacMitchell of NYU and Walter Mehl of Wisconsin were head and head. With 20 yards to go they seemed even closer. And when the tape broke,

not one of the spectators identify the winner.

Then the official announcement—"Winner of the NYAC Baxter Mile, Leslie MacMitchell."

"What about the time?" everyone asked, certain that the furious pace at the end of the race had helped to establish a record. It had! The mark was 4:07.4 and tied all existing records, with the exception of the 4:04.4 mile run by Glenn Cunningham at Dartmouth's specially built, six-lap, indoor track in 1938.

That record of Cunningham's has long been the target of controversy. Up in Hanover, the mile is run in six laps, two fewer than at the Garden. Those who won't accept Cunningham's mark base their opposition on the fact that turns take time, and the opposition to the Dartmouth record includes a goodly number of track experts and fans. However, many



With a driving finish, Les MacMitchell beats Don Burnham and Bill Hulse in a mile race at Triborough Stadium.

