

AT THE WHITE HOUSE AT 7 A. M.

Vigorous Morning Sessions of the "Medicine Ball Cabinet" Keep President Hoover and His Friends Hard and Fit for Work



Justice Stone—"When He Hurls Them They Stay Hurling."

Photo © Harris & Ewing.

By WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY

WASHINGTON.

THE President of the United States and eleven distinguished collaborators in exercise have invented, developed and perfected a new game which they play every weekday morning at 7 o'clock on the back lawn of the White House. It better suits their purpose as an aid to physical fitness, they think, than anything the world of sport had to offer ready made. Considering the identity of its sponsors, this game may be said to be highly recommended.

Three members of the Hoover 7 o'clock group—Ray Lyman Wilbur, lifelong friend of the President; Dr. Joel T. Boone, his official White House physician, and Walter H. Newton, his political secretary—recently discussed the evolution of the game with the writer and told of what goes on while it is being played six days a week at an hour when most of official Washington is still abed.

The game bears strongly the family traits of volley-ball, tennis and medicine-ball, yet is none of these. It wobbled about a bit in its early days, uncertain as to its gait. Now, however, it has acquired a permanent and characteristic stride and become a quite definite but as yet little-known entity in the sports world. Though everybody may be playing it next season, it has not yet been so much as christened. We may refer to it here as "Hoover-ball."

The game grew out of the President's need for exercise and a somewhat grudging assignment of time to it. It is no secret that Mr. Hoover prefers work to play. His chief interest has always been to get hold of some job and fight it for ten to fifteen hours a day. Much of the work of his life has called for grueling bodily activity, which his sturdy physique has endured like a blacksmith's anvil. To such men formal exercise is likely to look a little foolish. They associate it with pills that are possibly necessary, but unpleasant unless sugar-coated.

FROM the time Mr. Hoover came to Washington in 1917 as Food Administrator until he became President eleven years later he took little regular exercise. He had no interest in exercise as such and so did not go out of his way to get any of it. Beginning with war times he drove his own car in the interest of saving man power, and even after he became Secretary of Commerce he continued to take a good bit of air on the open road. There is not much exercise in riding in an automobile, however, even when you drive it yourself. In his eight years in the Department of Commerce he walked occasionally, nibbled a bit at setting-up exercises and occasionally went fishing. These activities were not sufficient materially to affect his physical well-being and the result was that he came to weigh more than he should.

President Hoover received his for-



much experiment. It turned out to be about eight feet. The proper weight of the ball for this game also must be determined by experiment. The big nine-pound medicine balls were too heavy to be pitched over this high net from the positions occupied by players. Experiment arrived at the conclusion that a six-pound ball, less in circumference than the gymnasium

exercise is obtained from half an hour of it as from three times as much tennis or six times as much golf.

The personnel of the Hoover ball club, which constitutes the President's sugar-coating, shows a range in age from 40 to 60, and in States of nativity from New Hampshire to Louisiana, from California to Minnesota. There have been a few changes in club members but the majority have remained the same. A star member is Dr. Wilbur of California, 55 years old, who is 6 feet 4 lankiness and has very long arms. He has a peculiar advantage in this game because of the altitude from which he can volley a ball over the net and still get it within the lines. In addition, he is a man of unusual physical strength and so becomes a formidable player.

Associate Justice Harlan F. Stone of the Supreme Court, son of New Hampshire, 59 years old, weighing 230 pounds, deep-chested, lusty, one-time football star at Columbia University, is the strong man of the organization. When he hurls them they stay hurling.

Attorney General William D. Mitchell, 57, from Minnesota, tall, slim, wiry, physically efficient, plays a fast game. Secretary Hyde of Missouri, 54, 6 feet, 180 pounds, well set up, disports himself creditably.

Other active members include the Solicitor General, Thomas Day Thacher of New York, 50 years old; Ernest Lee Jahncke, 51, of Louisiana, Assistant Secretary of the Navy; Ferry K. Heath of Michigan, 55, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and Lawrence Richey, 46, of Pennsylvania, and Mr. New-

THUS it works out that there are but two members of this group who have not passed the half-century mark—Dr. Boone and Mr. Richey. All the others are in their fifties; the average age of the group members is 53. It is surprising to find that the average weight would be around 180 pounds and the average height close to six feet. It is a lusty-limbed, deep-chested, old-American, hard-working, hard-playing aggregation. Its members are as noisy, abandoned, gleeful, frolicsome, as they would be if the hands of time were turned back twoscore years and the game were wolf-on-the-ridge at recess time in the old schoolyard. All of which confirms the not so well understood fact that male members of genus homo never grow up.

Four men make up a good team for Hoover-ball, but six, or three on a side, can do even better. The size of the White House group is not often more than twelve, but sometimes runs to fourteen or sixteen. Four courts in a row, however, are provided to accommodate all who may be present and to take care of such occasionals as Allan Hoover, who always plays when he is visiting the White House.

President Hoover was recently asked if he found exercising pleasant. "In the proper setting," he replied. A visit to the White House lawn on which his games are played reveals the significance of that remark. The garden of the Executive Mansion is quite informal, with flower beds, clumps of trees and expanses of smooth grass. There is an open sweep of grass immedi-

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Secretary Wilbur—"He Has a Peculiar Advantage Because of Altitude."

Photo From Union Pacific.



The President—"His Specialty Is Catching High Ones."

Photo From Fotogramas.



On his second day in the White House he talked matters over with Dr. Boone, the White House physician. Possibly, he ventured, he might be fitter for the big job if he took some regular exercise. What should it be? Golf? No, that required too much time. Walking? It did not call enough of the muscles into service. Volley-ball with its light sphere knocked with the hands across a high net? Not enough pull on the muscles. Bull-in-the-ring? It was not much of a game, but the medicine ball was a substantial, tangible thing on which to lay hands. Could not a game be evolved which used the medicine ball but which had in it all the elements of the contest of tennis? And there should be a contact with others, a fellowship, a frolic in the exercise as well as a contribution to health.

Then began the evolution of a game in which the tennis court furnished the ground plan. The medicine ball should be thrown over the net, caught and returned. Naturally the net had to be elevated, as when volley-ball is played. The proper height for securing balanced play could be arrived at only after

type, was about right. A good man, standing at the base line of a tennis court, could serve such a ball with one hand.

The game is scored as is tennis. The server throws the ball. The opponent must catch it on the fly and return it, attempting to put it where it cannot be reached and returned. The side that misses the ball or throws it out of bounds loses a point.

When the set-up is just what it should be the game is rapid. Every player is constantly tense; he must go after high ones, low ones, those to the right and left. Stopping a six-pound ball with steam back of it, returning it with similar steam, is not pink-tea stuff. Dr. Boone estimates that as much beneficial

Attorney General Mitchell—"Slim, Wiry, Physically Efficient."

Photo © Harris & Ewing.



ton, 51, of Minnesota, both secretaries to the President. Mr. Richey is a star athlete of the Hoover ball club, while Mr. Newton is tall, powerful and rangy. Dr. Boone, the President's



Dr. Boone—"Small, Dark, Quick as a Flash."

Photo From Underwood & Underwood.

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Sessions of the "Medicine Ball Cabinet" Keep The President and His Friends Fit

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ately in front of the balcony of Colonial columns; from this balcony the President usually views such gatherings as garden parties below. This was once the front of the house in its brownstone days of the early Presidents. Beyond the exercise lawn, at about the point which was described as a frightful mudhole in Jefferson's day, a fountain plays. There is a sweep of parkway, and the Washington Monument rises in the background. Great oak, elm and spruce trees shade the courts from the eastern sun.

It is wondrous quiet here in the early morning. Is it fancy, or do gentlemen in knee breeches and hoopskirted maidens wander about the end of the garden where Monroe once walked, and Lincoln sat with a shawl about his shoulders?

The nets, and the posts that support them, are taken down after the games lest they mar the garden prospect. Various emplacements that may receive these net posts are hidden beneath the grass, and the nets are moved about and courts relined that the grass may not be spoiled by overtramping at certain places.

With a President, a Supreme Court Justice, two or three Cabinet members and other high officials present in the group, one would feel sure that even a game in the open like this would take on something of dignity and formality. I asked about this. No, I was told. The deportment of the contestants was not unlike that at a town-lot ball game. Players were often subjected to a treatment technically known as "the raspberry." That primitive sense of humor which regards it as funny when some one slips, struggles and lands on his neck survives among these sometimes erudite and dignified gentlemen who have been known to laugh out loud when such things happen. Voices escaping from the White House lot in the early morning are sometimes described as raucous. There is no rank or distinction while the leather sphere is in the air.

The loyalty of the members of the group to its exercise scheme is shown by the fact that it quite generally disregards weather conditions. Through the Winter there have been many games with snow on the ground and in fact with snow actually falling. A mere drizzle does not halt the play and it has rarely happened that rain has come down hard enough to stop it. There is space in the White House basement where a good workout may be got by throwing the medicine ball, but the President's group has been driven off the lawn only two or three times in these two and a half years.

Between the courts and the White House are two large and venerable magnolia trees that become huge pink bouquets in the early Spring and supply dense shade through the Summer. Mrs. Hoover has had the ground beneath these trees paved with great flagstones and has set out a rustic table and chairs. When the thirty minutes of exercise is over the players pull



Secretary Hyde — "Disports Himself Creditably."

Photo From Associated Press.

on their sweaters and gather about this table for coffee, toast and fruit. This leaves just enough time for a dash home, a shower and breakfast at 8.

The health of the President, Dr. Boone says, is flawless. Most men, particularly those of vigorous physique, tend to put on flesh as the years advance. It is normal and proper that they should, but the tendency should not be allowed to go too far. Moderate exercise will take off obviously superfluous flesh, check the accumulation of weight, harden the muscles and keep them aglow with health. The President, for example, taking little exercise for a decade or more, had put on flesh until he weighed 210 pounds. This half hour of fast work at Hoover-ball every morning has reduced that weight twenty or twenty-five pounds and hardened all the bodily muscles. The desired results have been attained with the loss of little time and by a means that has brought pleasure to all the members of the White House early-morning group. The President is enthusiastic over this happy and healthful way of beginning each day.