

Four Leading Competitors in the Championships

S. A. Kaaten.

Sverre Andreas Kaaten (he went rather pink when he told me the "Andreas") ran his first race seventeen years ago at the age of seven. It was, ominously enough, a downhill race, and no doubt there was some coolness in the family when he toddled home to announce that he had fallen and was last. But the early diversion towards Central European forms of racing persisted, so that he came to Australia with a very much more open mind on

the subject of skiing than most Norwegians possess; indeed, he races to-day in Downhill or Slalom with almost the same zest as that shown by Mr. Mitchell in langlaufing.

Perhaps that early disappointment led to brooding. More likely still, it led to intensive practice. In any event there is a silence for five years until, at the ripe old age of twelve he joined his district Ski Club, the Kongsvingen Idretts Forening, whose green and white jersey and "K.I.F." is now so familiar round Charlotte's Pass. He started jumping at school and at 14 took to it seriously, winning the Club's junior competition against jumpers two years his senior. It should

be explained that in Norway junior jumping is divided into three age classes, 14-16, 16-18, and 18-20, the last



class containing most of the best jumpers in the country. In that year he was selected to represent Norway in the 14-16 class at Arvika, in Sweden, and won the Challenge Cup for his class with jumps of 29 and 31 metres. Jumping later, he broke the hill record for his class, with 33 metres. This, mark you, at an age when most of us had only read about snow. Later in the season he was beaten into second place in a junior competition at Skarnes by Træffen.

The following year bears a black mark in his life. It was, as he explains, his "falling year." He fell at least once in every competition in which he entered. The consequences of this are, of course, more serious in Norway than would appear to us. We are accustomed to the British method of allowing three jumps and counting only the best two, but such a system in Scandinavia would lead to utter recklessness in the last round, so that only two jumps are allowed and both count. Kaaten was chosen by his local Krets (District Association) to compete in the Norwegian Junior Championship at Hytly, but fell, as also at Arvika, where he represented again. The rest of his doings that year are apparently too painful to relate.

This had to be repaired. He opened his seventeenth year with hard practice on small jumps to regain steadiness, a task rendered rather more difficult by a weak knee, caused in the preceding summer by an absent-minded athlete who threw a discus at him. In the consequent operation he lost a cartilage. A more serious handicap were his final examinations, and he had little opportunity for jumping outside his own district. However, he managed to win a competition at Hoff and to improve considerably on his previous length of jumps. In winning the K.I.F. Jump for the 16-18 class he broke the open record for the Kongsvingen Hill with 38½ metres. Later the hill was improved and the record became 44 metres, while last summer it was converted into a monster 70-metre jump, though lack of snow has prevented its use so far.

At the age of seventeen he added further to his successes. It was a poor year for snow and many jumps were cancelled. This happened at Orebro, where Kaaten had been selected from the whole of his class in Norway to represent against Sweden. A further trip to Arvika resulted in his winning the jumping in his class (16-18), though no Challenge Cup was awarded that year. Competitions at Aasnes and at Grue were also added to his growing list of wins.

1927 saw the achievement of the ambition of all young Norwegians, when, at the age of 18, he was selected to compete at Holmenkollen. Having won the Kongsvingen competition in the 18-20 class, Kaaten was chosen with

Henry Jahnsen for the most famous ski-ing event in the world. Pale, but proud, the two youths ascended to the starting platform. Jahnsen drew the number immediately before Kaaten. The day became colder and colder, and *angst* increased with every moment as they waited for their turn to come. Finally, Jahnsen's number was called, and, yellow with fright, he approached the in-run. At the top he paused and turned to offer a last word of encouragement to Kaaten. But the chosen words refused to come. "See you in hell" he muttered despairingly and went over the edge.

Kaaten was eighth in his class, which was won by Sigmund Ruud, now holder of the world's record jump of 81 metres. At Lillehammer in the Norwegian Junior Championship that year, Ruud again won, and Kaaten was again eighth, falling on his first jump and getting 42½ metres on his second. He won many other events in that season, including the Mads Stang Memorial Cup at Kongsvingen.

The next was his last season in Norway. Moving to Sarpsborg, he still competed for the K.I.F., and also won an open jump in his class at Sarpsborg. A fortnight later, competing *hors concours* in a local competition at Sarpsborg, he put up a hill record of 41 metres. Holmenkollen that year produced another fall and a poor result. He did not go to the National Championships, but, competing at Midtstubakken, he did 52 metres and was sixth in a competition won by Sverre Kolterud, who came fourth in the Combined Langlauf and Jump at the Olympic Games this year. In this season Kaaten ran in his first langlauf and won a junior Club competition over 10 kilometres.

Coming to Australia in May, 1928, he did some ski-ing at Buffalo, but no racing or jumping. The following year he went to Feathertop and won the Victorian Open Championship, decided on a combined Slalom and Downhill. This was his first slalom race, yet I find in the Victorian *Ski Year Book*, 1930, that he gave "one of the best exhibitions of ski-ing yet seen in Victoria," running the course in 1 min. 18 sec. and 1 min. 17 sec. He also won the Open Handicap over the same course, but was not eligible for the S.C.V. Championship.

Kaaten went in 1930 to Buffalo for the Championship meeting there, winning again the Victorian Open Championship. In the Sharp-Brown Cup, an 8-mile Langlauf, he won by a narrow margin from two compatriots, Dahl and Drangsholt, and also won the Jump, which was held on a small hill, owing to the fact that the main jump was not ready for use. Visiting Mount Buller later, he won the Buller Championship, pressed closely in the Downhill and

Slalom by Hans Findeisen, and well ahead in the short Langlauf.

Transferred to Sydney, he came to Kosciusko with the K.A.C. in 1931 and entered on the same winning progress he had hitherto shown. Being immured for a fortnight in the Chalet by the blizzard which did its best to ruin the season, he emerged at short intervals to win races which are described elsewhere in this number. These included the No-fall race for the Downhill Cup, the Betts Camp Race (9-mile Langlauf), the Engadine Cup (Australian Ski-Jumping Club), the K.A.C. Club Championship, and the Australian Amateur Championship. In the latter he won three out of the four events (Slalom, Langlauf and Jump), and was a close second in the Downhill, taking the Mitchell Cup for combined Jump and Langlauf. Running for Victoria in the inter-State race, he came first in both Downhill and Slalom.

Kaaten's contribution to our ski-ing has not, however, ended with the mere collection of trophies. He has now settled in New South Wales, and has given the most welcome and ungrudging help, both in coaching and administration. He voluntarily went later in the season to Kosciusko to give some coaching in jumping and langlauf to the University Ski Club, his advice and assistance were constantly sought during the Championships, he was always ready to help jumpers and jumping-judges in learning their business, and his experience has proved invaluable on the Technical Committee. Better still, he has proved his willingness to learn. Mr. Hans Fay, Consul-General for Norway, was standing one day at the bottom of a slalom hill. He was approached by Kaaten, who asked, *sub voce*, "What is this tail-wagging that Mitchell does, and how does he do it?" They came to no conclusion on the subject and moved off to watch the manoeuvre in progress, applying the results the following day.

His jumping is a lovely sight—perfect ease and confidence on the in-run and an excellent body-position, in the "Bonna" style, in the air. Merely watching Kaaten jump has done more to improve our jumping here than anything we have experienced before. Indeed, for an isolated community, we have been very fortunate in having the opportunity in the last two years of seeing such men as Kaaten, Collins, Mitchell and Lang.

During the summer Kaaten became engaged, most appropriately to another skier, Miss Shirley Parker, whom he met at Kosciusko with the K.A.C. We extend our congratulations to both, allowing ourselves so much deviation from the strict bounds of an official publication.

That is all, I think, except that Mr Arthur Mailey,

who kindly contributed the accompanying drawing, tells me that Kaaten's features are far too regular for caricature.

T. W. Mitchell.

He fell first in 1913 and hated it. That was at Klosters, and I have a most delightful photograph of him, practically obliterated by a balaclava cap, standing on his little ski beside a luge, thinking childish thoughts about slaloms. His father, who guided his early ski-tracks, allowed him one stick, which (*absit omen*) he confesses he rode with wicked enthusiasm. But that was long ago and may be forgiven.

Apparently some fearful experience of his ski-ing youth seared his spirit, for in 1925 and 1926, when he was in Europe and should have known better, he sternly refused to visit Switzerland, and it was not until 1927 that John Rymill, of South Australia, lured him to Gstaad, where there was a bad season, which nearly diverted him from ski-ing for life. However, in the following Easter, he went to Finse, in Norway, and, deciding that there might be something in it, began practice for the Q3 Test of the S.C.G.B. Christmas, 1928, was spent at Kitzbühel, in Austria, with Rymill and Miss Beryl Collins, and he entered the local Ski School, under Rudi Moritzer. Here he absorbed the doctrine of the stem-Christiania and heard the hills resound with scorn for the Telemark. He had not yet acquired his later enthusiasm for the game, and it required the ulterior motive of the pursuit of an attractive German girl skier to infuse some spirit into his tepid interest. At this point, I find a note from him, saying, "Improved 200 per cent." Perhaps this had something to do with the choice of his first race—a mixed doubles wheelbarrow race—in which he came second. In the Richardson Cup for Visitors he was third to Major Bracken (father of the famous W. Bracken), by a distance unmentioned, which I gather was rather long. Early slalom attempts followed, and in the Silver Ski he managed to run fourth, after a shameful fall at every flag. Nevertheless, he liked it, and was pained by the heartless refusal of his attempts to enter for the Ladies' Slalom. This season also saw the attainment of two very estimable ambitions. He passed the Q3 and Third Class Tests and left Kitzbühel in a hurry, after asking Major Bracken what was the "K" badge he was wearing.

Easter took Mitchell again to Finse, with Yoshi Kagami and Sir Richard Boord. By this time ski-ing had bitten him hard, and he put in stern practice for the Q2. With Colin Wyatt he made a High Alps tour that summer, crossing on ski from the Jungfrauoch to Grimsel, and reaching

13,000 feet. Finally, at Christmas, he came to Mürren, so that his racing fate was sealed. Two events occurred almost at once, which left their mark on his ski-ing career. He was elected to the Kandahar and met W. R. Bracken. When entrusting me with the delicate task of writing his ski-ing career, Mitchell made one request, which I now hasten to fulfil. He asked that some adequate acknowledgment should be made of the debt of knowledge which he owes to that prince of downhill racers. I can only remark that he is a lucky man to have had such a teacher, and that it is a debt which many of us would willingly take over.

Wisely, he refused to race until he had passed Q2. This was accomplished after a month's coaching, and he then enjoyed one of the best races of his life in the Richardson Cup, in which he was second to H. W. L. Puxley. His trip to Finse that year gave an opportunity for some long tours and some coaching in jumping by the famous Tullin Thams. Returning to Mürren at the end of 1930, he found a shortage of snow, which compensated to some extent the fact of enforced idleness, due to an operation. Towards the end of the month, however, he began to ski again, and to practise for the Q1, running into second place in the Strang-Watkins Slalom and in the Carillon Downhill. Early in 1931 he passed Q1 and began to race in first-class events. Running in the British Ski-Running Championship he was 15th out of 40 entries. This race taught him to learn courses beforehand, for, owing to neglecting this precaution, he lost his way (and much time) in the Hindmarsh section of the Downhill. Next day he ran fifth in the Roberts of Kandahar and was awarded the Gold "K" he had so long desired. Then came more intensive coaching from Bracken and some lessons in flag-judging and course-setting for slaloms from Arnold Lunn. A month of this left him rather stale, and an ill-advised attempt to take Quorum Glade straight ended in his bursting on a rock and being removed with concussion. Shortly afterwards, while still rather dizzy, he received our nomination as Australian representative in the F.I.S. Downhill races at Mürren. That meeting was described in the 1931 *Year Book*, and there is no need to say more here than that he acquitted himself well against a splendid field of runners. But I suppose he looks back on the Arlberg-Kandahar race with the greatest pride of all. Not even the F.I.S. races that year succeeded in overshadowing this, the most famous of all downhill races, which brought a splendid collection of experts to Mürren. Mitchell was 36th of 68 starters in the Downhill, which was won by "Matterhorn" Furrer, of Zermatt, with Prager, Matt and

Sigmund Ruud in the next three places. This qualified him for the Slalom (first 40 competitors in the Downhill) in which he ran 21st, beating, among others, Prager himself. His place in the combined result was 27th, which earned a special word of praise from Arnold Lunn in the last *British Year Book*. That account of the A-K races by Mr. Lunn is the best I have yet read, and every reader of this book should hasten to it for the sake of his soul.

Mitchell was also third in the Unseen Slalom, and in the Gotterdämmerung Cup, and then moved on after the



Drawing.

Miss H. Mitchell.

T. W. MITCHELL.

A-K to Kitzbühel, where he was fifth in an open international race, beating many of the guides who had taught him two years before. Going on to Germany (I recommend his own article in the last *British Year Book* on this tour) he was 45th out of 90 entries in an open international race at the Zugspitze, breaking a binding, but managing to finish in the Downhill. In April he was 13th in an open race at Obergurgl, and concluded this spring tour by leaving for Australia. He put in a short trip to Mount Cook on the way home, and arrived in Sydney in time to join

those who were leaving for the National Championships at Kosciusko. His Club and Championship racing record there can be gathered from the racing reports in this number. It included a second equal with Pentecost in the K.A.C. No-Fall race on Mount Stilwell, and a second in both Slalom and Downhill of the inter-State race. He won the Downhill in the Championships, and was second in the Slalom, winning his own Cup for the *kombinierte* Slalom and Downhill. Naturally, the Langlauf and Jump in the Australian Championship pulled down his marks for the combined event, but he ran a plucky race into seventh position in the Langlauf, and was fourth in the National Championship results, losing third place to McFadyen by a very narrow margin. In the K.A.C. Club Championship, which was run last year in conjunction with the National Championship, he occupied the same places. Racing in the Ski Club of Australia's Championship later, he was second to Sodersteen in the Downhill for the Teece Cup, won the Consett Stephen Slalom and the Pauss Cup for the combined event. Without a pause he rushed on to Victoria and spent some days in bed at Mount Buffalo nursing a bad ankle. Thence to Hotham, where he won the Victorian Open and Restricted Championships and a turning Championship. And I nearly forgot that he won a Novice Jumping Competition at Charlotte's Pass for members of the A.S.-J.C., while he is founder and undoubted champion of the T.M.O.B.S.C., whose headquarters are situated on the Upper Murray.

Perhaps the outstanding quality of his ski-ing is its enthusiasm. The concentration and technical care of his turns, the wholehearted energy of his running and the determination in his racing justifies one in applying such a mental standard to a physical manifestation. It was interesting to compare his ski-ing with that of Kaaten. One skied by the light of nature, the other was a product of intensified specialisation. There could be no better example of the difference between the Scandinavian and Central European schools than these two. The same restless enthusiasm that he shows in his running appears in his administrative work. He is chairman of the S.C.V. Racing Committee and holds a dozen other official positions. From his fastness on the Upper Murray he pours an unending stream of correspondence, mainly telegraphic, on the hapless heads of Club officials in both States, starting them from their summer slumbers with suggestions, advice, argument and pleading until they are forced into action. Without doubt this stimulant is extremely good for them, and in their calmer moments they willingly admit the fact.

V. G. Wesche.

His first winter-sportings were at Klosters in Switzerland and took, I regret to say, the form of skating. However, a painful fall, the nature of which I can only gather from the fact that it broke a pipe in his hip-pocket, put him off the game, and in his second season he saw the light and hired some ski from the local shop. The proprietor of that shop little knew his customer. The next day he returned, explaining that one of his ski had come apart in his hand, and that, following the custom of the proprietor he would like another pair free of charge. The proprietor laughed in his carefree way and handed them out, receiving back the pieces a week later. His laughter took on a hollow ring, but he nobly followed the tradition of his shop and found a further pair. In a few more days he was suggesting, as he surveyed the shattered remains, that it might be as well if the visitor bought a pair for himself, and, had his suggestion been carried out, he might by now have retired on the profits. But it was not until the last week before he left for Australia, by which time the small boys of Klosters were following him around collecting kindling-wood for their mothers and every stump carried a portion of binding, that Wesche bought a pair of ski. He broke them on his first day at Kosciusko.

I remember him, myself, as he guided me on my first painful trip down the Parsenn run, performing prodigies with half of one ski tied on with a handkerchief. He explained at the time that one soon learned to keep the weight on the top foot if the other had only half a ski. Whatever the reason, he learned a remarkably good open Christie (this was before Schneider had in-



V. G. Wesche.

roduced the Stem-Christie and the Bend-Down-Sister idea) and was soon able to catch the train at Küblis by two pints, as against the miserable half-pint of his early days. He also acquired aspirations to yodel, and won a silver thimble affair in the only race in which he took part. He points out, however, that this was because he was fifth and the first four came from the other hotel. He then came back to Australia from Oxford, having done mostly touring and no very serious ski-ing.

In Sydney, Wesche bought his famous ski-ing hat and went to Kosciusko, broke a few ski and came back after a week. The following year he joined the K.A.C. and went again to Kosciusko, but had to return to Sydney before the Club races. In 1928 he was elected to the K.A.C. Committee, became one of its representatives on the Ski Council, and was made the first Honorary Secretary of that body, a position which he has held ever since. Only those who have been associated with the Council know just how well he has done as Secretary. Imperturbable in the controversies which so frequently agitate all ski-ing organisations, he carries through the ever-increasing duties of his position with a good humour which makes him an ideal official. The trust which the Council reposes in his judgment is reflected in his election as one of the two N.S.W. delegates to the A.N.S.F. while his technical knowledge gained him a place on the Technical Committee.

In 1928 he was second to McFadyen in the K.A.C. Championship, and ran a splendid race in the Australian Open Championship, at that time a five-mile langlauf. He was second, behind G. Aalberg until the last few yards, when he fell and was beaten into third position by R. Larsen. The following year he won the first organised jumping competition ever held at Kosciusko, and was second in the Club Championship to J. W. F. Collins. Since then his racing record includes the winning of the No-Fall race for the Downhill Cup from Collins and T. F. U. Lang in 1930, and a place in the first N.S.W. team last year. He was away for the 1930 Championships, but did well in 1931. He is a racer who is capable of upsetting expectations at any time, and frequently beats those who are supposed to be his superiors. This is perhaps the outstanding characteristic of his running. One can never regard him as being out of a race, for he has a nasty habit of suddenly popping out from behind a rock and winning. Slalom is the branch of racing at which he does best, but he can put up a very dour and determined race in a langlauf. He held the first third-class jumping badge given at Kosciusko and has passed Q2 of the running Tests.

Wesche holds four records. He has written on wax

more times than anyone else in Australia, has thought of trying for the Summit Trophy more often than any other skier, holds the record for the fastest time on ski down the Hotel stairs, and wore (until the Chalet dog ate and died of it) the worst hat ever seen on Australian snowfields.

E. L. Sodersteen.

This is the story of what is known to journalists as a "meteoric career" in ski-ing, for it began only in 1927 with its first Sitzmark and opens 1932 with a distinct chance of the State team. Sodersteen tried his first ski-ing in the former year and did not take it very seriously until two years later; so that he has, in three of our brief seasons, made an astonishing advance. One frequently sees this happen in Europe, where intensive training and scientific coaching schools make it possible to reach a fairly high standard in a very short time; but here, where coaching is haphazard and few people get more than a fortnight's ski-ing each year, it is remarkably difficult. Sodersteen's rapid improvement should be a great incentive to the younger skiers of this country, and I imagine that he would be the first to say that it was due firstly and lastly to consistent racing against men better than himself.

His first season was distinguished only by the care-free spirit which normally accompanies his ski-ing. He was given a pair of ski, took them to the top of the Grand Slam, ran it straight without falling, and asked what one did next. Nobody quite knew. He then won a novice race on the Kerry Course and went home. Joining the Millions Ski Club next year, most of his ski-ing season was spent in the tragic search for the lost skiers, Hayes and Seaman. In 1929 he came up with the K.A.C., stayed on for the M.S.C. season and began, that year, his first serious ski-ing. After three days in bed with influenza he ran a creditable seventh in the five-mile race, which then constituted the Australian Championship. Some hard touring was done with Utne, of Norway, who was at Kosciusko that year and the rest of the K.A.C. races were missed. In the M.S.C. Championship he surprised everyone by running second, and still more when he won a downhill handicap race from scratch, and followed it by winning the Club jump. With his usual facility for getting something for nothing he attached himself to Kaufmann, of Austria, who was doing well in Club races that year, and worked hard at acquiring the Arlberg technique.

By this time he was properly bitten by the sport, and began to acquire the correct outlook that life is only a long spell of existence between two winters. In 1930 he came up to Kosciusko with the K.A.C., two broken ribs and a roll

of sticking-plaster. Many of us still remember painful attempts to change the sticking-plaster in the bath each evening with the earnest but embarrassing assistance of everyone present. He ran without success in the Downhill Cup (No-Fall), which was won by Wesche, from Collins and Lang, was second in the scratch downhill race at the



Photo: H. Fishwick.

Courtesy "Sydney Mail."

Sodersteen after an icy run in the Championship Langlauf.

Smiggin Holes and fourth in the jump. By this time a marked improvement had begun to appear in his running and he passed the Third-Class Test.

In 1931 he maintained the improvement, passed Q2 and the British and Australian Third-Class Jumping Tests, and took life very seriously. His training was characteristically severe. In the first two weeks of his season he ran madly

round the Main Range and drank the Chalet out of lemon-squash. His only solace was a mournful bottle of port, which lasted him a fortnight. However, hard training for several weeks bore fruit when the Championships arrived. In the Downhill he ran off the course in the mist of the Hindmarsh section and lost much time, but in the second section he had the best time, beating European-trained racers in Mitchell and Kaaten. Perhaps his best race was the Langlauf, in which he was third, well up with Kaaten and Collins. He captained the N.S.W. second team which ran *ausser konkurrenz* in the inter-State race, and later ran splendidly in the Teece Cup Downhill of the S.C.A., winning from Mitchell and Fay. The Slalom, however, lost him the Pauss Cup, for he missed a pair of the flags in the heavy mist and dropped nearly a minute going back for them. In any event, he was not up to Mitchell's standard in this form of race, and it is in the strange combination of Langlauf and Downhill that his strength lies.

For a lemon-squash drinker he shows remarkable courage in racing, and his record bears witness to his ability to learn quickly. If he continues to improve at his present rate he will soon be a first-rate skier. A season in Europe would make a vast difference to his running, provided he specialised in his two best races and left jumping and slalom-running alone.

And I nearly forgot to add that he designed the cover for this issue.

WHERE THE YEAR BOOK MAY BE PURCHASED.

The Year Book can be obtained in Sydney from Messrs. Angus & Robertson, Castlereagh Street; the Government Tourist Bureau, Martin Place; or from the publishers, Sydney and Melbourne Publishing Co., Ltd., 29 Alberta Street; at Kosciusko from the Hotel office; in Melbourne from K. Gibson, 30 Kerr Street, Fitzroy, N.16; in Hobart from Messrs. Oldham & Merri-dith, Elizabeth Street; in New Zealand from W. S. Rennie, 137 Victoria Avenue, Wanganui.

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