

Volume 39, Number 2

Libraries 1, 2 & 4 REOPEN See Pg. 7

March/April, 2014

MR. AND MRS. MURDER AND **MAYHEM**

By RWUN Editor Fred Hobbs

Chances are that if you, in real life, lived next door to any of these couples you might want to move elsewhere. That's because you would be

interrupted constantly by а parade of unsavory characters. not to mention a cadre of persistent law enforcement types.

Not to worry, though. They would come into your home through the magic emitting from your console or portable to provide Old Time Radio programs full of murder and

mayhem with a pleasant dose of domestic humor to lighten the mood. The three happily married couples to be described in this article are Nick and Nora. Pam and Jerry and Jean and Pat.

Nick and Nora Charles were characters created by the famed writer Dashiell Hammett in his mystery novel The Thin Man. As with many adventures aired during the Golden Age of Radio, the story

lines and characters unfolded first in print, then on



the motion picture screen and finally on radio, although some movie series were patterned after broadcast favorites. (*The Whistler* is an example.)

Nick Charles was a retired private detective and his wife Nora, a wealthy, eccentric heiress. Also living in the Charles swank New York apartment was their fox terrier, Asta. Somehow, they never could escape the weekly murder case which they

> were sure to solve within the 30-minutes allotted.

In the midst of the quest to unravel the murder plot, the ever-suave talking Nick and the sophisticated, and sexy sounding Nora provided the light-hearted touches of romance that OTR listeners enjoyed.

Three separate stalwarts of the broadcast acting profession played the role of the martini-drinking sophisticate

> Nick over the show's nine-vear run from July, 1941 until September 1950: Les Damon, Les Tremayne Joseph Curtin. and Claudia Morgan went the entire way in a very convincing portrayal of Nora. Her voice inflections segued between the affectionate. cuddly wife and the clear-minded



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RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

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2014 Convention Schedules

No conventions have been submitted at this time

RETURN WITH US NOW...

analyst in the process of finding out "who done it?"

OTR historian John Dunning noted Nick's "running acquaintance with such characters as Dippy Danny the Pickpocket, Charlie the Creep and Big-Ears Benny.

Each of the actors was so successful in his/her radio role that many listeners thought they were actually listening to William Powell and Myrna Loy who starred in the series of Thin Man adventures on the big screen.

All four networks of Old Time Radio...CBS, NBC, Mutual and ABC...carried the show at separate points. Sponsors included

Woodbury Soap (NBC); General Foods-Post Toasties, Maxwell House Coffee and Sanka (CBS); Pabst Beer (in another NBC run);

Kaiser-Fraser automobiles (Mutual) and Heinz Foods (ABC.)

And, if you are curious about how "thin the man" moniker emerged, here's the explanation as given in the print accounts and the original movie: It seems that the mysterious and



"Jerry and Pam North" - Richard Denning and Barbara Britton

eccentric character, Clyde Wyatt, the central figure in the plot, was actually murdered. A skeletonized body found during an investigation turned out to be a "thin man" disguised by large sized clothing on his body. This ruse was uncovered. As the story goes, Wyatt was killed by thieves who had stolen large amounts of money from him on the night that he was last seen.

None of that apparently was explained in the radio series. It was called just The Thin Man from the first broadcast.

If Nick and Nora Charles were denizens of glamorous Manhattan constantly besieged by characters from the sleazy side of Gotham,

Jerry and Pam North enjoyed a different style of life than the Charles'. The featured couple of the show named for them, Mr. and Mrs. North lived in a much different New York City environment in **RETURN WITH US NOW...**

Greenwich Village. The two couples had one major link, though...murders; investigating and solving them. Jerry and Pam were described by writer Dunning as "simply an ordinary couple who just happened each week, to stumble over a corpse."

Sources in Wikipedia point our that in his book, Radio Crime Fighters, Jim Cox wrote that in the radio mystery-melodrama "the couple who passed themselves publisher off as and his homemaker-spouse continued to make lighthearted wisecracks as they stepped over bodies in dark alleys and were rendered unconscious by unknown assailants dispensing blows to the head almost every

> week. Cox continues: "The feminine half of the (North) twosome was at least equal to the husband in solving cases that often baffled law-enforcement officers with years training of and practice-except in reading clues. No explanation was given, of course, as to why a couple of misfits could be so successful in their preoccupation while professionals the thrashed about ineffectually."

OTR collectors, listeners and avid fans of the by-gone world of classic radio might urge Mr. Cox to chill out a bit. It's fantasy..."Theater of the Mind." Sure, on Mister and Mrs. North," the listener is brought into a make believe world where serious crimes can be solved in a matter of minutes.

Just as in The Thin Man, the North's encountered a full roster of unlikely and often unsavory characters. A regular on the show was a cab driver named Mahatma McGloin, who "helped" the Norths solve the murders through his contacts while also adding a comment or two that elicited a few chuckles from the audience.

Jerry and Pam also had weekly contact with NYPD homicide detective Lt. Bill Weigand and his sidekick. Sergeant Aloysius Mullins. the quintessential "dumb but loveable cop." Weigand was a capable and tough investigator, but strangely March, April 2014

shy around the opposite sex. Again, as with Nick and Nora, it was the wife, Pam, who was usually the one who figured out who the killer was. She not only offered her intuition and clues to help Lt. Weigand in solving the murder, but also gave him unsolicited valuable advice concerning his love life.

The stars of *Mr. and Mrs. North* when it first hit the air on NBC in December 1942, were Joseph Curtin and Alice Frost. Richard Denning and Barbara Britton played the roles later in the series. The first sponsor was the maker of Jergens Lotion and Woodbury Cold Cream. The show moved to CBS in July 1947 and remained on that network in various time spots, sponsored by Colgate-Palmolive.

In 1946, Mr. and Mrs. North received a

significant award for a radio show of its kind and in that era. The Mystery Writers of America honored the program (in a tie with CBS' *Ellery Queen)* with an "Edgar" Award (named for Edgar Allan Poe) for Best Radio Mystery Drama.

Prior to its success on Old Time Radio, Mr. and Mrs. North appeared in the 1930s in pieces written by Richard Lockridge, who recycled them as short stories for The New Yorker. Lockrdge later teamed with his wife Frances to write a series of 26 novels featuring the North characters. A Broadway play that ran for 163 performances was mounted in 1941 and the wonderful Gracie Allen appeared in a 1942 MGM

movie based on the couple's exploits. A three year TV run starring Denning and Britton hit the small screen in the early 1950s.

Because if its long broadcast run and the reach to millions of listeners, radio is the medium that brought *Mr. and Mrs. North* its greatest attention. At least, that's what Old Time Radio fans insist!

Lesser known, but worthy of note in the annals of Mr. and Mrs.-themed radio mystery shows is *Abbott Mysteries* later known as *The Adventures of the Abbotts*.

Nine years passed between the two versions of this comedy-crime drama. The first run was on the **RETURN WITH US NOW...** -4-

Mutual network 1945-47. It was strictly a summer replacement show, substituting for the quiz program *Quick as a Flash.* Mutual, though it boasted a large roster of stations, typically had fewer listeners. Many of its affiliated stations were in smaller markets. That, plus the fact that the Abbott show was aired only in the summer made the effort to reach a high spot in the ratings very difficult. Also the very successful *Thin Man* and *North* programs were firmly established hits with a format and story line very similar to the late-arriving Abbotts.

The second run faced even a more difficult task although it did last a complete season on NBC from October 1954 until June 1955. Ironically, the stars were Claudia Morgan and Les Damon, the first



"The Abbotts" - Les Damon and Claudia Morgan

couple to pay the leads on *The Thin Man* thirteen years earlier.

As portrayed on the air, Jean and Pat Abbott were a young San Francisco married couple who had a knack for...you guessed it, solving murders. The story lines featured the same light-hearted approach as its predecessors, but the Abbott show never had a chance to reach the popularity and acclaim it perhaps deserved. And that is because 1954 and 1955 were considered the biggest breakout years electronic for the new elephant in the room...television.

Ownership levels of TV sets in American homes had ballooned by then. Old Time Radio drama and

comedy was dying as a staple of family entertainment. News, recorded music and the disc jockeys who spun the discs dominated the radio spectrum.

The Golden Age of Radio was nearing an end and with it the demise of Nick and Nora, Jerry and Pam and Jean and Pat *live on the air*.

But the voices are still here recorded and preserved thanks to individual OTR collectors and the libraries of the Radio Historical Association of Colorado.

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OTR FOR THE GENERATIONS

From its infancy in the early 1920s until its role as a major component of American pop culture all but disappeared from the airwaves in the 1960s, what we now call Old Time Radio served audiences within a wide spectrum of entertainment and information.

Today, listeners and viewers have access to both entertainment and information on what are called "multiple platforms." Satellite radio offers dozens of program choices. All manner of sounds come out of the small devices you can hold in your hand.

In the days of vintage radio, networks and

individual stations offered choices confined to just one instrument, be it cat whiskers with earphones, a living room console with wires and tubes inside a handsome wooden box. or later portables and car radios.

Programs were

provided for virtually every age demographic ...moppets, teenagers, 20, 30 and 40 "somethings" not to mention grandmas and grandpas.

Two examples of the OTR quiz and talk show offerings are explored here, sort of the "yin" and "yang" of Old Time Radio.

The Quiz Kids catered to listeners of all ages, but its "stars" ranged in age from 7 to 16. The show was created by Chicago public relations and advertising expert Louis G. Cowan and originated from NBC's studios in the Windy City.

The premise involved selecting a panel of highly intelligent youngsters chosen, according to Wikopedia, for their high IQs, strong academic interests and appealing personalities, coupled with qualities such as poise, quickness and a sense of humor.

The unlikely choice for quizmaster was Joe Kelly, a jovial, avuncular former vaudeville performer and host of the countrified musical and comedy show, NBC's The National Barn Dance. Kelly freely admitted to be much less than a genius; **RETURN WITH US NOW...** -5-

in fact he was a school dropout who couldn't have answered most of the program's questions without the use of a pre-program brieflng session and flash cards. But his friendly, kindly manner dealing with the intellectually gifted kids made for very pleasant and successful radio.

Americans first heard The Ouiz Kids on June 28, 1940 as a summer replacement for Alec Templeton *Time*. The longtime sponsor was Alka-Seltzer.

One of the first pint-sized panelists was seven-year old nature expert Gerard Darrow. (More about Darrow later in this article.) Rounding out the panel were Mary Ann Anderson, Joan Bishop, Van Dyke Tiers and Charles Schwartz. All the kids were from Chicago-area schools. Panelists rotated with the three top scorers each week joined by two others the following week. They "graduated" when they

reached age 16. One of the challenges

reportedly on the first show was to spell correctly four of the following five words:

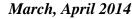
esophagus, hypothesis. Allegheny,

psychology and the very tricky

hors d'oeuvres.

Many of the young contestants excelled in specific specialties. Among the best remembered were math experts Richard Williams and Joel Kupperman. At age 7, Kupperman astounded audiences with his ability to do complex mathematics rapidly and seemingly "in his head." He once exhibited his ability to multiply correctly any number times 99. He had a slight lisp and when asked to explain how he was able to accomplish this feat, he replied: "It's a theequit twick." He revealed the "secret trick" with this explanation: he merely multiplied the number by one hundred then subtracted the same number from the previous total to get the correct answer...all "in his head" and in a matter of a few seconds.

Joel Kupperman also possessed an extensive general knowledge as did another favorite on the show, "Ruthie" Duskin. She also had a specialty of her own, a vast knowledge of Shakespeare's works. She debuted on the program at age 7 and went on to appear more than 150 times in nine years.







In adulthood, Ruth Duskin Feldman (married to Chicago attorney Gilbert Feldman), after rearing her three children, became an award-winning reporter, feature writer, editor, photographer and lecturer. She co-authored college textbooks on subjects including both child and adult development. Early in her writing career she tackled a question many loyal fans of *The Quiz* kids had begun to ponder. She authored the extensively researched book, *Whatever Happened to the Quiz Kids? Perils and Profits of Growing Up Gifted* (originally published by Chicago Review Press, 1982; more recently released through iUniverse, 2000.)

So popular was the subject of that work that Ruth was interviewed on radio and TV shows including *Good Morning America, Today, Donahue and CBS Sunday Morning*. Publications including *The New York Times, People,* and *The Chicago Tribune* reviewed the book and "quizzed" the writer about her stint as one of the "Kids" and the information she uncovered concerning the later lives of the other young super-intelligent contestants on one of vintage radio's most endearing programs.

As Ruth tracked down her Quiz Kid colleagues in the prime of life, she was said by reviewers to have answered some of these questions: Did these gifted kids fulfill their youthful promise? What were the fruits—bitter and sweet—of their childhood fame? What can today's young people, their parents and teachers, learn from their experience? OTR enthusiasts can access Ruth Duskin Feldman's book for more definitive and detailed answers, but two contrasting revelations among the earliest of the *Quiz Kids* participants especially standout.

Joel Kupperman, the mathematics whiz became a professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut and author of *Six Myths About The Good Life*, described as a popular philosophical volume "centering on those values most worth engaging in human life." He and his wife, Karen are

parents of two children, Michael, a noted illustrator and Charlie, a medical journalist.

Kupperman today enjoys his private life and steadfastly has declined all requests for interviews. He reportedly shares the concerns of many of the *Quiz Kids* alumni about the effects of their celebrity status at such early ages. Ruth Duskin Feldman not only wrote about the other child stars on the program, but explored in her book some of her own thoughts on how the experience affected *her* life.

Many other show alums achieved various success or notoriety over the years as pointed out by OTR chronicler John Dunning. Richard Williams, dubbed "the super Quiz Kid" became a highly placed U.S. diplomat. Harve Fishman served as a TV producer under the name Harve Bennett. Joan Bishop sang with the Chicago Opera Company, but missed her bid to join the "Met" in New York. And, Lonny Lunde was quoted as saying he worked "as a composer by day and a lounge pianist by night."

The most dramatic, unsettling and sad Quiz Kid story unfolded in the life of one who appeared on the very first broadcast...Gerard Darrow.

"With an I.Q. of 144 and a prodigious memory for a child," wrote biographer Tom Shorthouse, "he was the first Quiz Kid to be recruited for the radio program, having delivered a school lecture in Chicago, at age six, in which he identified three hundred bird species. When asked, 'Where would you plant vallisnaria and calomba?", he replied coolly, "in a fish bowl, because they are aquatic plants."

But, for perhaps a multitude of reasons, Darrow's adult life did not bring him the joy, satisfaction or accomplishment that might be expected of one so gifted. Darrow died at the age of 47, his health and spirit apparently broken, spending a good portion of his life on welfare.

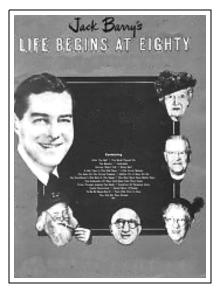
The Quiz Kids aired on NBC television from 1949-1953 with Joe Kelly as quizmaster and returned for an encore for one season in 1956 (on CBS), this time, ironically with Clifton Fadiman as host. Fadiman, who presided over the more avant-garde and intellectual panel show *Information Please* was passed over at the outset in favor of the down to earth Kelly. The video version seemed to lack the warmth, charm and human interest appeal of the long-running radio series, as often proved to be the case when attempts were made to convert Old Time Radio presentations on to the small screen.

While for years the younger set was ably represented by *The Quiz Kids* during the Golden Age of Radio, a similarly formatted show hit the air

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during the same era "starring" a panel of octogenarians and "90-somethings." *Life Begins at 80* was hosted by Jack Barry and produced by his partner Dan Enright. The show debuted on the Mutual network in July, 1948, long before the much-publicized TV quiz show scandals that ensnared the pair.

By coincidence (related to *The Quiz Kids*,) Barry earlier also had created the show *Juvenile Jury* featuring children from 5 to 12, not answering difficult questions, but discussing "the problems of their peers."



On *Life Begins at 80*, the long-experienced oldsters spoke frankly and freely about subjects suggested by questions sent in by the listening audience. Some of the responses were a bit too "salty", "racy" and even sometimes "blue." This caused Barry to tape the sessions in advance and edit portions of comments that would be inappropriate, especially for a nationwide program in the 1940s!

The two most prominent panelists on the show were Georgiana P. Carhart, an 83-year old former Broadway actress and 81-year old Fred Stein, cousin of writer and poet Gertrude Stein. The oldest was said to be "Pop" Gordon, age 92. The show left the air in 1949, and then returned on ABC for one season in 1952.

The Quiz Kids was by far the more popular of the two shows explored here, but the contrast with *Life Begins at 80*, illustrates that Old Time Radio indeed served the listening needs and preferences of a big swath of Americana.

And doesn't it seem strange that a 7-year old Quiz Kid of 1940 today is 81? Wouldn't it be fun to organize a panel of surviving Quiz Kid alums for a lively session a la "Life Begins at 80?"



Hello everyone,

Libraries one, two and four are now available!

Yes, finally, our librarian David Gatch is back in his Colorado mountain home. You'll recall that we reported that the area around David's home, near Estes Park, was devastated by historic 2013 flooding. Fortunately David's home was not damaged but the library media that he controls had to be left behind when he was evacuated by helicopter. Just this month the reconstructed roads have allowed David to start moving back in. David says that he will be ready to take orders again at the first of April and begin to send out media shipments before the 15th.

There have been a disappointingly high number of folks who did not send in their 2014 membership dues. This was even after receiving the dues materials in the Nov/Dec newsletter, a plea for dues in the Jan/Feb newsletter and with a reminder postcard (even though we originally said we would not send out). Consequently we had no choice but to cancel these people's membership and discontinue sending newsletters to them. If you know any of these folks perhaps a reminder by you might help to bring them back into the fold.

At a recent meeting the subject came up about whether or not there might be RHAC members who no longer order/collect OTR programs because they <u>only have reel-to-reel equipment to work with</u>. If you are in such a position we would consider making the RtoR library available for this <u>special</u> <u>situation</u>. Please write or email and let us know addresses on page 2.

Good listening to all, Larry

Maybe National Public Radio would air it!

RETURN WITH US NOW...



The team from The Radio Historical Association that deals most closely with its operation recently compiled a list of twenty of the most memorable and enjoyable Old Time Radio shows.

TWENTY"

These strictly arbitrary choices are from RHAC members who collectively possess a veritable overflowing knowledge of the stars, program formats and broadcast histories of thousands of vintage radio shows.

Our "distinguished panel" had fun compiling the list out of so many genres of shows. We hope you enjoyed refreshing memories, and let us know if we left out any of your favorites.

- 1. The Jack Benny Program. Many OTR fans cite Benny's show as their "fave" for its hilarious interplay between Benny, his cast, guests and the presentation of Jack's on-air character as a vain miser, jut the opposite of his real life personality.
- 2. Gunsmoke. Great tales of the U.S. Marshall in Dodge City, his cohorts and adversaries. Terrific scripts, acting and sound effects.
- 3. Our Miss Brooks. Laugh out loud comedy. Eve Arden portraying the poorly-paid school teacher surrounded by a would-be boyfriend (the bashful biology teacher), a dotty landlady, a bombastic principal, a mischievous student and his girlfriend (daughter of the principal.)
- 4. The Lone Ranger. Everyone's favorite masked law and order man and his faithful Indian companion Tonto.
- 5. Amos 'n Andy. Historic radio comedy that captured the rapt attention of listeners in the 1920s and maintained popularity during 34 years on the air.
- 6. Bob and Ray. The two men voiced all the characters in this truly original romp of satire, silliness and audio slapstick.
- 7. Suspense. Billed as radio's outstanding theater of thrills.
- 8. Lux Radio Theater. Radio adaptations of popular motion pictures of the day.

- 9. Johnny Dollar. An insurance investigator gets involved in more serious situations, sometimes even murder.
- 10. Your Hit Parade. Popular songs of the week as determined by record sales and jukebox plays. Orchestra and top singers, including for a time Frank Sinatra and Doris Day.
- 11. Fibber McGee and Molly. Long running extremely popular husband and wife comedy. Fibber a spinner of tall tales, Molly the patient wife who gets Fibber out of numerous comedic predicaments.
- 12. Adventures of Sam Spade. Detective show based on a character created by writer Dashieil Hammett. The lead well portrayed by Howard Duff.
- 13. One Man's Family. Long running saga of the Barbour family of Sea Cliff, San Francisco.
- 14. The Great Gildersleve. A favorite situation comedy of many for its depiction of the life and loves of a somewhat vain, but lovable bachelor. the uncle to two children and a would-be lover to eligible single ladies and widows.
- 15. Let's Pretend. Saturday morning dramatizations of fairy tales.
- 16. X Minus One. Science fiction stories.
- 17. Jack Armstrong. "The All-American Boy." Juvenile adventure tales on 1930s, 40s radio.
- 18. Escape. Dramatic adventure anthology with fine cast including the talented William Conrad.
- 19. Egar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Bergen was a ventriloquist, Charlie, the wooden "dummy" who in the comedic scripts tried to outfox the man who gave him voice.
- 20. Phil Harris/Alice Faye Show. Phil, real life bandleader and longtime cast member on The Jack Benny Show and Faye, a popular screen star, were husband and wife. Their comedy was ably abetted by a wisecracking kid named Julius and Phil's hard-drinking buddy, Frankie Remley.

Of course, it is impossible to rate these and dozens of other Old Time favorites in any particular order. They are all great shows from "The Golden Age of Radio."

RETURN WITH US NOW...

March, April 2014

RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

TAP	E 2011 YOU	RS TRULY JOHNNY DOLLAR	1200'
1L	11-05-49 11-12-49	Mother Call My Draft Board, I'm Leaving The Country Again Who'd Like To Rock The Old Doll To Sleep?	
2L	11-26-49 12-03-49	The Skullduggery In Skull Canyon Mine Bodyguard To Ann Cornelly	
1R	12-10-49 12-17-49	The Circus Animal Show Matter The Haiti Adventure Matter	
2R	12-24-49 02-03-50	How I Played Santa Claus And Almost Got Left Holding The Bag Death Takes A Working Day Matter	
TAP	PE 2012 THE	BIOGRAPHY OF GUNSMOKE	1800'
1L	04-25-76	Part 1	
2L	04-25-76	Part 2	
1R	04-25-76	Part 3	
2R	04-25-76	Part 4	
TAP	PE 2013 THE	BIOGRAPHY OF GUNSMOKE / GUNSMOKE	1200'
1L	04-25-76	BIOGRAPHY OF GUNSMOKE: Part 5	
2L	06-07-52	GUNSMOKE: Buffalo Hunters	
	06–14 -5 2	GUNSMOKE: Jailbait Janet	
1R	04-26-52	GUNSMOKE: Premiere Show - Billy the Kid	
	05-10-52	GUNSMOKE: Jaliscoe	
2R	05-24-52 05-31-52	GUNSMOKE: Ben Slade's Saloon GUNSMOKE: Carmen	
TAF	PE 2014 GUN	SMOKE	1200'
1L	07-05-52	Never Pester Chester	
	07-12-52	The Boughten Bride	
2L	07-19-52	Doc Holiday	
	07-26-52	Gentleman's Disagreement	
1R	08-02-52	Renegade White	
	08-09-52	The Kentucky Tolmans	
2R	08-16-52	The Lynching	
	08-23-52	Shakespeare	

505

RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

TAPE 2015 GUNSMOKE

1L	08-30-52	The Juniper Tree
	09-06-52	The Brothers
2L	09-13-52	Home Surgery
	09-20-52	Drop Dead
1R	09-27-52	The Railroad [Rehearsal]
	10-03-52	Cain
2R	10-10-52	Hinka-Do
	10-17-52	Lochinvar

TAPE 2016 GUNSMOKE

1L	10-24-52	The Mortgage
	10-31-52	Overland Express
2L	01-03-53	Westbound
	01-10-53	Word Of Honor
1R	01-17-53	Paid Killer
	01-24-53	The Old Lady
2R	01-31-53	Cavalcade
	02-07-53	Cain

TAPE 2017 GUNSMOKE

1L	03-14-53	Cyclone
	03-21-53	Pussy Cats
2L	03-28-53	Quarter Horse
40	04-04-53	Jayhawkers
	01 01 00	saynamens
1R	04-11-53	Gonif
	04-18-53	Bum's Rush
2R	04-25-53	The Soldier
	05-02-53	Tacetta

TAPE 2018 GUNSMOKE

1L	05-16-53 05-23-53	The Big Con Print Asper
2L	06-06-53 06-13-53	Sundown Spring Term
1R	06-20-53 06-27-53	Wind Flashback
2R	07-04-53 07-11-53	Dirt Grass

1200'

1200'

1200'

1200'

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