

2-16-1995

## Remembering Fred Perry and Nat Holman

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### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Remembering Fred Perry and Nat Holman" (1995). *On Sport and Society*. 266.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/266>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
February 16, 1995

Over the past two weeks two major sports figures of the Twentieth Century have died. On February 2, Fred Perry died in Melbourne, Australia at age 85, and ten days later on February 12, Nat Holman died in the Bronx at age 98. Both men made major contributions to their sports.

Fred Perry won three straight Wimbledon championships starting in 1934, a feat not matched until Bjorn Borg's five titles in the 70s, and Perry did not lose a set. He was the first player to win all four Grand Slam events although not in a single year. The closest he came to that was 1934 when he won the British, U.S., and Australian titles. In 1933 he was the first British player to win the U.S. Championship in over thirty years, and he led the British Davis Cup team to prominence with four straight victories in the 30s. He won eight grand slam titles in his career, and was the first foreigner to win three U.S. Championships. Perry turned professional in 1937 and won his final pro title in 1941.

As a player and in retirement he loved life in the fast lane, and frequented the Hollywood scene where he could be found playing celebrity doubles with his partner Charlie Chaplin. A sporty dresser Perry produced a clothing line in 1949.

But my personal memories of Fred Perry come from much later. What little I know of tennis as a sport I learned from Fred Perry the tennis commentator for the BBC for several decades. No one could analyze a match, or a player and their style, better than Perry. He could describe with amazing clarity over radio what was happening in a match and, more importantly, why it was happening. I would watch Wimbledon on television, and then wait for Fred Perry's analysis of the match on the BBC to clarify for me what exactly I had seen. He increased my understanding and appreciation of both the tactics and psychology of tennis, and made me wonder why others could not match his skill as a commentator and analyst.

One of his favorite axioms on tennis was that once you get an opponent down you must never let them up. You must put your foot on their throat and keep it there.

Ten days after Fred Perry's death, Nat Holman died in New York City. Holman had two distinctive and significant basketball careers, as a player and as a coach.

As a player Holman learned the game in the early part of this century on the streets of New York City. He was a graduate of the Savage School of Physical Education, received a Master's Degree from NYU, and turned professional in 1921. At the end of that season with the Whirlwinds, he joined the Boston Celtics and stayed with this dominant team of the 20s through 1927. In 1921 he became the junior varsity basketball coach and varsity soccer coach at CCNY, and two years later he became the head basketball coach, giving him the distinction of being both a pro player and college coach simultaneously.

He became famous as a Celtic, who billed this 5'11" forward as the "world's greatest basketball player," sharing the spotlight with 6'5" Joe Lapchick. This was the dream team of the decade credited with popularizing professional basketball and Holman was a major factor in Celtic success.

But Nat Holman is probably better remembered as a coaching genius in the college game. Described by some as a cold and self-centered man he was nonetheless an excellent teacher of the game. During the 30s and 40s he crafted CCNY into the best college basketball team in the nation, coaching there for 37 years.

Along with Joe Lapchick, Clair Bee, and Howard Cann, Holman made the college basketball doubleheader at Madison Square Garden one of the premier sporting events of the city. His teams played New York Style with quick passing, movement without the ball, boxing out on the boards, and aggressive defense. And it was highly successful. In 1950 his team became the only one in history to win the NCAA and NIT championships. But the price was too high.

A year later it all came apart when his players and those of several other schools were caught in the first major point shaving scandal of college basketball. Holman was shocked and denied any knowledge of the practice, but he had cut corners at CCNY on admissions standards, where forging transcripts was not an unknown practice. Suspended from coaching by the New York City Board of Higher Education, he was reinstated after two years, but Holman's teams never reached the heights again.

A great player, a great coach, a basketball genius, unfortunately Nat Holman never totally escaped the shadow of scandal.

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