

## ***Courage Has No Colour Line***

# **LEARNING TO WALK AGAIN**

### ***The Story of Bill Charles***

**T**HE country sports arena is packed as the eight runners go to the starting line!

A few words from the starter and they take up their positions on the line.

"Hands on your mark; get set" . . . the crack of a gun, and the field is off, eight of the fastest runners in the district striving for a coveted trophy.

Slowly a dark-skinned athlete emerges from the ruck, and streaks away to an easy win.

The judges confer for a moment, and then over the microphone comes the announcement, "The winner of the hundred yards. Bill Charles. Time, ten seconds." A gasp goes up from the crowd for everyone had seen that the dark athlete was running barefooted.

. . . A very short space of time and the scene changes. This time no cheering crowds, no flashing limbs . . . no roars of applause.

Just a simple little cottage at La Perouse and on a bed on the back verandah is the same young athlete. Only this time HE HAS NO LEGS.



It's the same Bill Charles.

Despite two years of agony and mental anguish, that same infectious grin is there, the same quiet laugh. It IS the same Bill Charles.

Two years ago, Bill fell beneath a fast-moving train at Lismore and lost both his legs. Now he must learn to walk again!

When Bill left school, he became a police tracker cadet at Moree, where he spent six years; then he was transferred to Dubbo for his final six months' training under Sergeant Alec Riley.

His training finished, Bill spent the next two years in the Mudgee and Pilliga districts, but the job was too slow and he gave it away to take up, firstly, timber felling, and then dairying.

Bill discovered he had a natural talent for boxing, and travelled about the country a lot with Harry Johns' boxing troupe.

Bill was an outstanding runner too, for he consistently clocked even time for the hundred yards, and in the high jump could clear two inches better than his own height. (Bill is 5 ft. 9 in.)

He also excelled in football, cricket and tennis.

When Bill lost his legs he had lots of ambitions, just like any average young man. He hasn't lost those ambitions but his ideas must change and he must start all over again.

The Aborigines Welfare Board has arranged for Bill to be fitted with two artificial legs, and he has to learn to walk again.

"Once I could run 75 yards in less than 8 seconds," says Bill, with a wry smile, "Now it takes me more than 8 minutes to cover the same distance."

Bill will shortly go to the rehabilitation centre at Jervis Bay, to be taught to adapt himself to his new limbs and to learn some trade that will provide him with a living.

Bill has had a lot of pain and a lot of worry in the past two years, but he is a happy personality, and he feels the future has lots of good things in store for him.

The only thing that really worries Bill now, is that the severed nerves will itch sometimes, and he unconsciously scratches his wooden feet expecting to get some relief.

Bill is a shining example of that undaunted courage for which the Australian aborigine is renowned, for he has put aside his fears and worries and is determined to make himself self-supporting . . . as soon as he learns to walk again.

Courage has no colour line!