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Bob McKinnon

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FROM: BOB GILLULY
SPORTS NEWS EDITOR
MONTANA UNIVERSITY

RELEASE AFTER MONDAY, FEB. 29

MISSOULA---Adventurer, playwright, humanitarian, scientist and athlete. Rather an odd combination of avocations, but Montana University senior Bob McKinnon fits the bill in all respects. Aside from being one of the top freestyle swimmers in the Skyline Conference, McKinnon recently wrote, produced and directed a one-act comedy at MSU to critical acclaim. And for the past two summers he has traveled nearly 7,000 miles in a small boat with assorted companions such as two other MSU students and two coon dogs. To top it off, McKinnon and his bloodhound have also been called on a number of search and rescue missions in the Montana mountains during the past year.

"I guess I'm just naturally curious," says McKinnon. "I've always wanted to do a number of different things, and I seem to get ideas as I go along."

Highly illustrative was McKinnon's playwriting venture, entitled "The Sport of Kings." Bob, who had no previous experience with drama, signed up for a dramatics course this winter under Prof. Douglas Bankson. In the course of normal classroom work, Bankson suggested that McKinnon enter an MSU writing contest. The three best student works would be selected for staging in late February.

So McKinnon sat down to his typewriter and ripped off his hilarious farce in about a week, according to Bankson. The drama selection committee immediately proclaimed it one of the finest student comedies they'd read. McKinnon was given the green light to stage his production.

With typical effectiveness, Bob signed up five swimming team members as actors. Surprisingly enough, all five turned in fine performances--breaststroker Wayne Veeneman, butterfly expert Ivan Jacobsen, freestyler Chet Jolly, and freshmen
(more)

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Bob Dick and Doug Hay. McKinnon himself constructed all the props and directed the rehearsals. He even added himself to the cast for a short part.

"The audience simply howled," is Prof. Bankson's appraisal of the success of the play. But even this had an unusual note. On the night of the performance, Feb. 20, the Grizzly swimming team was matched against Idaho and Eastern Washington in the Montana pool.

Swim coach Bud Wallace accommodated his thespians by scheduling the meet an hour earlier than usual and shifting the events in which the actors were scheduled. The four varsity members won all eight of their events, swiftly changed out of their swim trunks, and dashed to the MSU Theater, just in time to climb into costume and go on stage.

Swimming-wise, McKinnon is considered one of the two top freestylers in the Skyline League. The only senior on the team, McKinnon will play a large part in Grizzly fortunes this weekend, when the Silvertips are in Albuquerque, N.M., for the Skyline title meet.

"Bob swims like he does everything else--in outstanding fashion," is coach Wallace's comment. "Sometimes he exasperates me, but he's a darn good one."

The coach explained that McKinnon only swims fast enough to win. Once or twice in the past two seasons McKinnon has been caught napping as he loafed along.

"This happened in the conference meet in 1959. Bob was nosed out in one race that he should have won by 50 yards. He simply didn't watch the opposition," said Wallace. "So the next night he came out and swam one of the most sensational laps I've ever seen. He anchored our medley relay team that set a new conference record and really burned up the pool."

"If he's pushed real hard, he should set a couple Skyline records this weekend," the coach added.

McKinnon doesn't limit his exploits to school-year activity. In the past two summers he has boated down (or up) two major watersheds. In the summer of 1958,

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accompanied by MSU student Donald Calfee of Frazer, Mont., he started down the Snake River in Idaho, reached the Columbia in eastern Washington, and then floated the length of the Columbia to Portland, Oregon. From there the students portaged to northern California and went down the Sacramento River to McKinnon's home in Oakland.

His 1959 task was more ambitious. He and Bob Gornick of Kalispell, Mont., accompanied by hunting dogs, Lead and Loud, set forth from Fort Benton, Mont., head of navigation on the Missouri River. They boated, in a 14-foot craft with a 10-horsepower motor, all the way to Saint Louis, reversing the course of two adventurers named Lewis and Clark of 155 years previous.

From St. Louis they worked their way down the Mississippi, then entered the Tennessee River watershed. Then they portaged to the upper reaches of the Savannah River and eventually reached the Atlantic Ocean. This was followed by a quick dash back to Missoula--a week late for the opening of school.

This series of adventures--complete with gasoline shortages, wet food, and lost dogs--received national coverage by several wire services.

McKinnon also has a bloodhound that strictly isn't a pet. The hound is an accomplished tracker, and Bob has participated in several search missions in the past two seasons. The most recent was in the rugged Bitter Root Mountains, south of Missoula, for a missing MSU student. The dog helped locate the student, dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, after a six-mile trek over steep mountain country.

McKinnon also dabbled in scientific ventures during his high school days in California. Once, as a student project, he laboriously took long-range movies of the heartbeat of a pigeon. He later wrote a lengthy treatise that his instructor proclaimed as one of the finest original works he'd ever seen.

McKinnon himself tends to downgrade his activities. "I just get interested in something, and go ahead and do it," is his simple comment. But take the word of a number of professors and coaches--here is a highly unusual and talented young man.

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