



TONY LAVELLI, Yale

NIJINSKY OF HARDWOOD:

Lavelli Even Topped The Mighty Mikan

By HAROLD WEISSMAN, N. Y. Daily Mirror

Howard Hobson has two things going for him when Yale launched its bid for the NCAA crown in the Eastern Regionals: Precedent and Anthony Lavelli, Jr.

Precedent because in this, Hobson's second season at the Eli helm, he stood on the edge of a parallel of his second year as coach of Oregon University—in 1939—when his Webfeet quintet annexed the very first NCAA championship held. And to give the harbinger just an extra little squeeze for luck—this marked Yale's first post-season basketball tournament appearance in history.

On the second count—Anthony Lavelli, Jr.—the soft-spoken mentor of the Ivy League kingpins had the tangible thing going for him: a minimum of 20 points a game if form charts and statistics mean anything. For that is the incredible four-year average of this Somerville, Mass., product who has become the scourge of the Yale statistical department with his total of 1,929 points that cleanly wiped out the hitherto unprecedented 1,870 compiled by Large Jarge Mikan at DePaul.

And Large Jarge, currently punching more holes into the Basketball Association of America scoring tables than a trolley conductor at a transfer intersection, made his collegiate scoring mileage good for

"only" 19.8 per game in contrast to Tony's 20.3.

Yale's handsome 22-year-old field leader with the cropped black hair and uncropped gold records has become basketball's most fabulous campus figure of the post-war period. At least no figure in the Eli archives has eluded his firm grasp. As he stands now—all six feet 3 inches of him—the only record Tony doesn't possess is the one the late Thomas A. Edison waxed on his original gramophone.

Among the Yale and Eastern League standards Tony's picturesque hook shot and deadly aim from the foul line have written into the books are: most points per page (52); season (636); four seasons (1,929); field goals, one game (20); fouls, one game (17) and fouls, season (554). All but the penultimate figure was established this season; yet all surpassed achievements which Tony himself had accomplished in pyramid fashion through his four-year production on the Eli assembly line.

The foregoing leads one's eyes, like the flight of a tennis ball, toward an inevitable comparison with Hank Luisetti, Stanford immortal and unanimously conceded the greatest of the contemporaries. Hobson is qualified to venture an opinion since the old Gray Eagle of the Pacific slope learned of Luisetti's prowess from bitter personal experience while guiding the destiny of Oregon.

"Comparisons are unfair and difficult," murmurs Hobson. "But Luisetti was the most versatile player I've ever seen—professional or collegian—yet to my mind, Lavelli has the more prolific shot."

And what are Tony's sentiments on the subject? With characteristic modesty, Lavelli responds: "I

once went out of my way to see a movie because Luisetti was in it. When the picture was finished I realized the goal of all subsequent basketball players could only be 'the second best that ever lived.' " And Tony is quick to add he doesn't consider himself an aspirant for the rating.

However, what Lavelli aspires to be the "greatest of" is an accordion player. His penchant for the musical caterpillar box is traced to a vaudeville act he saw on the same program which billed Luisetti on the screen. Tony's background for the sharps that don't fall flat stems from his mother, who taught piano and ordered her offspring to the keyboard at the age of five.

However, after watching the musical magic unwind from the vaudevillian's fingers that day, Tony raced home and pleaded for an accordion. He's since made the dormitory walls sway with his accordions whenever a spare moment offered itself from his more publicized role of making gymnasium walls sway in acknowledgement of his court heroics.

Apropos of the latter, watch him tonight as he dribbles toward the goal, veers to one side as he approaches the foul circle, extends one arm after taking a step away from the basket and releases the ball in a graceful arc as his 185 pounds twist in reverse and make of him a veritable Nijinsky of the hardwood.

That's the famed hook shot which has caught every basketball eye in the country. Particularly the professional coaches hounding his shadow. And which lucky one will have THE Tony upon graduation?