

## The NEW BERN

## MIRROR

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Yesterday was when New Bern's juveniles, and adults too, found great enjoyment seeing Johnny Weissmuller perform on the screen as Tarzan of the Apes. He made 19 of the movies during a 17-year span.

There were Tarzans on camera before the 6-3, ex-Olympic star, and others since, but no one else is firmly associated with the role. Even today's kids, at Fort Lauderdale, admirably use the name when addressing him.

Weissmuller, now 68, is still in good physical shape, and swims daily. This editor's only glimpse of him, in the flesh, was in 1939 when he and Eleanor Holmes were the top Aquacade stars at New York's World Fair.

Although Johnny's first MGM contract called for only \$500 a week, small by current standards, he was around long enough to make \$2 million out of wearing a loincloth, and swinging on jungle vines.

The Tarzan that those of us born before 1940 remember broke national, world or Olympic marks almost every time he competed. For example, he set 67 records and won 52 national championships.

His speciality was the freestyle, and was unbeatable in all events from 100 meters to 800 meters. He was the Mark Spitz of his day, internationally idolized before he ever turned pro and headed for Hollywood.

Weissmuller didn't have to grow longer hair for his Tarzan role. That is, not to a considerable degree. He wore it that way, extending below his collar, as an amateur athlete, and it caused critical comments at times.

No one can say for sure whether Johnny, if seriously challenged, could have defeated Spitz. Never was he pushed to the limit. Significantly, he won every race he participated in, during 10 years of competition.

He won three gold medals of the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Two were individual awards in the 100-meter freestyle and the 400-meter freestyle. The third was as anchor man for the American team in the 800-meter relay.

In 1928 at Amsterdam, he defended his 100-meter crown and again anchored the 800-meter relay. He continued competing and winning until he signed for the Tarzan role in 1931. No doubt he would have dominated the 1932 Olympics, if he had been in them.

"The closest I ever came to losing," he recalls, "was in 1924, in the 400 Olympic final. I got a mouthful of water, but I knew enough not to cough. If you don't cough, you can swallow it."

All former greats believe they would have done well against those later on the sports scene, and Weissmuller is not an exception. "I was better than Mark Spitz is," he says without hesitation.

"I didn't win nearly as many Olympic medals, because there weren't anywhere near the number of events when I swam. There was no 200-meter race or

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**NO LONGER THERE**—Day in and day out, this bench along the fence of New Bern's Christ Episcopal Church is a joyous spot for Senior Citizens. They while away the hours, repeating oft told tales as they watch the world go by. The

blizzard that struck the town last weekend put them out of commission, all but removing the entire bench from view. It didn't matter that much, they were at home by the fire.—Photo by Billy Benners.



**ALMOST LIKE BERN**—This scene puts one in mind of our Mother City. The whirling winds left some roofs bare during our worst snow storm of the century, including a portion of the First Citizens Bank Building now under construction. But there was plenty of the white stuff on the top of Christ

Church Parish House. In the distance are Craven County Court House and Sudan Shrine Temple. If your eyes are good you can even see snow on the shore of the Neuse in Bridgeton.—Photo by Billy Benners