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the champ is probably the club president, J. G. "Tod" Slaughter who, without getting a place, went through the whole agony 20 times between 1938 and 1964. His rival must be J. B. Cross who over a span of 29 years finished 15 times between 1932 and 1961. It is such feats which support the view that the tie, awarded to finishers in the walk and traditionally worn each Friday for some reason no one can remember, is "the only tie in the Stock Exchange won on merit".

How to survive to be PM

Ziad Rifai, the new Jordanian Prime Minister, is the first Premier appointed by King Hussein who is actually younger than the monarch. What Rifai, 36, shares with King Hussein, born a year earlier, is a capacity for physical survival. He is known in Britain because 18 months ago, when Ambassador here, his car was machine gunned by Black September gunmen in West London, Rifai escaping with a wounded hand.

Back in 1960, when attached to the Premier's office, Rifai was asked to fetch a file by the then Prime Minister, Hazza Majali. When he was out of the room, a bomb exploded killing Majali and 10 others. And in July, 1970, in the run-up to the Jordanian Civil War, King Hussein and Rifai drove out together from the Hummar Palace to investigate an outbreak of shooting between the army and commandos. They found themselves under a hail of machine gun fire. Rifai persuaded the King to take cover in a ditch where he and an Army major jumped on Hussein to shield him. Hussein complained that together they

had done him far more harm than the commandos.

Rifai comes from one of the powerful East Bank families which have little sympathy with the Palestinians and has been a prime target for the commando movement since 1970 when it was believed that he strongly advised King Hussein to take the initiative against them before it was too late. Friendly with Hussein since they were together at the Christian Missionary School in Amman, Rifai's father, Simar Rifai was one of Hussein's early prime ministers; his uncle, Abdel Moneim is another recent premier; and he is married to the daughter of yet another, Bahjat Talhouni.

Educated at Harvard and Columbia (but by no means as pro-American as his enemies say) he cut a polished figure as ambassador in London. He returned to be the King's Political Adviser, in which role he may well have wielded more power than his rather colourless predecessor as prime minister, Ahmed al Laouzi. Rifai has observed that Jordan has two types of premier, those who go to the king before making every decision and those who consult him only on broad policy directives. Undoubtedly, Rifai sees himself in the latter category. While in London he made no secret of the fact that he would eventually be premier.

Somebody up there . . .

A Canadian radio station was recently off the air for 24 hours when its transmitting aerial was struck by lightning. The incident occurred at the end of a "phone-in" show. The show's subject? "Is God dead?"

Observer