

Heroes of the Roped Ring

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up by his long hair and rained uppercuts on him until he went below.

They call it the Dempsey haircut now, but never since Mendoza fought Jackson in 1795 has any boxer gone into the ring with hair long enough to get a hold on. The custom has outlived the age of bare hands, so that to-day we see boxers who look like film stars sacrificing their marcelled locks—as if they are afraid they may be seized by their opponents' padded gloves.

Gentleman Jackson is, of course, one of the most famous of all champions. Living in the great days of the Regency, when dukes and princes clustered round the ropes and talked the jargon of the fancy, he had half the nobility at his gymnasium in Bond Street, and Byron was vain of his acquaintance. He stands in boxing history as the epitome of the golden age of Corinth; of curly-brimmed castles, of gigs and curricles and phaetons massed round the twenty-four foot ring, of sporting amateurs and titled backers in the corners where the huge muscled pugilists in tight and silken stockings rested for brief half-minutes on their seconds' knees.

They were a great crowd, those fighters of the Regency: Jackson and Mendoza, Tom Cribb, the man of iron, and Jem Belcher, the gallant and vain, who would not yield his championship even when he lost an eye; Tom Spring of Hereford, John Gully—Gene Tunney's prototype, who like him left the ring after three championship battles and took up respectability—the only pugilist to become an M.P.; the Game Chicken, and Molineux the Black, the fighting Moor, precursor of those coloured fighters who have made so much ring history until they produced Jack Johnson, heavyweight champion of the world.

The prize ring reached its zenith in their days, and after them declined until, at the end of the century, came (as they say in Hollywood) the gloves.

Perhaps they emerged, some of the veterans of the Regency, from their little pubs in Soho and around Holborn and Leicester Square, for the last great knuckle battle, when in 1857 Tom Sayers, the champion of England, fought John Heenan of America, the Benicia Boy. No fight of the century has left such records as this. It was the first of the great international contests, and the papers were as full of it as they were of the sorry affair at Miami not so long ago. Thackeray wrote copiously of it; for weeks there was controversy about the result. It was a great fight, certainly, with that disparity between the antagonists that always makes for excitement, for Sayers, though heavyweight champion, stood five feet eight inches and weighed only around eleven stone, while the American was a real heavyweight of six foot two. But Sayers, like Fitzsimmons after him, made nothing of a handicap of some three stone. The Tipton Slasher had had that advantage, and after Sayers had done with him his fighting career was at an end. So Heenan frightened Sayers no more than he frightened his backers who, after a morning spent in dodging the police, met in a meadow near Farnborough to see the greatest fight ever fought with bare hands.

And yet, two hours and twenty minutes later, with the crowd wild with excitement and the police struggling desperately through it to the ring, the end came in a way as unsatisfactory as any of the fiascos to which we are accustomed now. Sayers's right arm was broken, Heenan's eyes were closed so that he had to grope his

way toward his man, yet both fought fiercely on. Then Heenan got the Englishman's head under his arm and forced it down on the ropes till Sayers went black in the face. That was too much even for a rugged age. The ropes were cut, the police broke in, and the fighters disappeared in the crowd.

The result was a draw, though Heenan's admirers claimed the championship for him. As so often, the aftermath of counter-claims was unsavoury. But nothing could alter the conviction of those who had seen the battle that Sayers had given the most supreme display of British pluck and skill that even the old prize ring had ever seen.

As the century went on the brutality of P.R. fighting increased as the skill and the pluck diminished. There were fights like the one between Billy Edwards and Arthur Chambers, in Detroit in 1872, where a world's championship changed hands through the foul trick of a second who bit his own man on the chest between rounds and charged his opponent with it next time they met in the middle of the ring. After Jem Mace the great procession of pugilists tails away, and in their wake comes a seedy cortege of ruffians, saloon-keepers and hangers-on.

BUT the art of the raw 'uns passed on one legacy to the new art of glove fighting, with its more civilised conditions and rules. John L. Sullivan, the Boston Strong Boy, first world's heavyweight champion with the gloves, began his career under the sterner code. A great figure, John L., with his flowing moustache and mighty muscles, and the hot temper that so often got him into trouble in his later days, when Gentleman Jem Corbett, the most elegant boxer that ever held the title, had deposed him in twenty-one gruelling rounds at New Orleans in 1892. Then John L. toured America with his road show of "Uncle Tom's

Cabin," where he played Simon Legree until one night on the stage Uncle Tom asked for a rise and the old champion socked him in the jaw and bust up the show. He went on the stump as a temperance orator, and then had to apologise to the saloon-keepers whose bars he had smashed up in his unregenerate days.

He was a picturesque champion, more so than ever Pompadour Jem Corbett, who succeeded him, even though he was a boxer who made connoisseurs catch their breath with joy. And Sullivan was avenged by another fighter with no grace about him: Bob Fitzsimmons, the Cornishman, who never weighed twelve stone, whose arms were like wire ropes, whose flat feet and thin legs and bald, freckled head made a grotesque spectacle in the ring, but who whipped the biggest and the strongest men in the world. It was not until James J. Jeffries arose, as big as a bear and as fast as a cat, years younger and stones heavier, that Fitz had to let the heavyweight championship go back to the heavyweights again.

Jeffries was unbeaten when he retired, and, as usually happens when a champion retires, a slump set in. Tommy Burns, who succeeded him, was about as worthy a world's champion as Sharkey, or Schmelling, or whoever it is, is now. And then, on the turn of the tide, came Jack Johnson, the giant negro, one of the greatest figures in the whole story. Fifteen stone, immensely strong, and harder to hit than any big man of his time, he taunted the white race with its inability to find a man to beat him. His fight with Burns at Sydney in 1908 was a nightmare. Outfought, outboxed, outmatched even at the mouth-fighting in which he had always excelled Burns was offered up as a victim to Johnson's pride of race. Everybody hated the big nigger, and nobody could stop him in the ring.

They brought Jeffries out of retirement, but 'they' never come back." Johnson continued his arrogant career until, in 1915, finding his title had ceased to be profitable to him, he took a count from Jess Willard, the Man Mountain, who was a fighter just about good enough to beat Phil Scott.

MORE great names come crowding in upon us as we recall the history of fighting with the gloves; great names and picturesque careers. There are the great British boxers—Jimmy Wilde the Welsh Wizard, so small that he fought above his weight in the flyweight class, who looked as though a punch would kill him, and who handed out trouncings to opponents of every size and every degree of skill. A real fighting phenomenon, whose punches came from all angles at incredible speeds, and always full of steam.

Jim Driscoll, the Peerless Prince, the most perfect boxer of them all, a great-hearted fighter who never had an enemy, whose final defeat when, with illness gnawing his vitals, he went down to a lucky punch from a man years younger, is the most glorious achievement in the annals of the N.S.C. He was a great man as well as a great fighter, and when he died all Cardiff walked behind his coffin, boxers and jockeys and publicans, side by side with the nuns and orphans to whom he had been a friend.

There is Alf Mansfield, who fought Wilde himself, hugging the dreadful secret that he had lost the sight of one eye. There are the great negroes—Peter Jackson, another chivalrous battler, who never got a chance at the world's title; Sam Langford and Joe Jeannette, and that ageless mystery the Dixie Kid, who drifted from nowhere across the fistful world, beat all the best men at anywhere round his weight, and vanished again nobody knows where.

THERE was the meteoric career of Georges Carpentier, the pit-boy from Lens, who fought his way weight by weight through the French titles, and then, before he was twenty, weighing some twelve stone, electrified Europe by knocking out Bombardier Wells, the champion of England, at Ghent in 1913. Poor Beautiful Billy, the destined stepping-stone in the Frenchman's path! The same year came the return fight in London, the first of those lightning knockouts which Carpentier taught us to expect. Then, dropping a curtain across Carpentier's career, came the war.

The end of the war found another British champion, Joe Beckett, just waiting to put him back on the map. Beckett went the same way as Wells, and he stood not on the order of his going. The last rung of the Frenchman's ladder led him into the arena at Jersey City, where Jack Dempsey met him and sent him back to his own class. For he was a class out with Dempsey in weight alone, and there is an old ring proverb about that. And yet he so nearly pulled it off; he did all he could hope to do, and landed on Dempsey's craggy jaw that "poisonous right" that had never failed him yet. It failed him now; the Manassa Mauler staggered and came back, and Carpentier's right hand had not stood the blow.

After the event it was easy to say the men were badly matched, but Carpentier had cast a spell over Europe, and even after his beating he remained

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