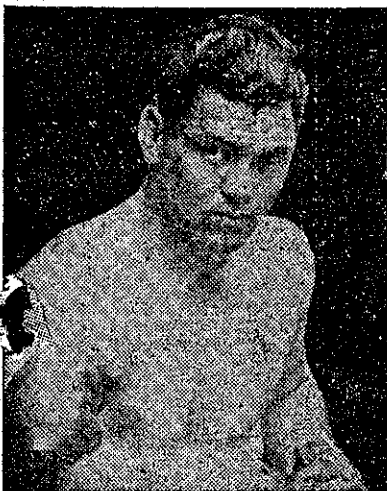


Heroes of the Roped Ring

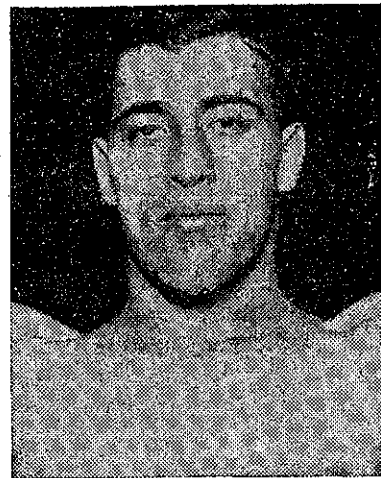
What listener has not thrilled to the tense "He's down!" of the commentator describing a boxing match over the radio? Even those previously uninterested in the glove game find themselves hanging on every word and wondering what will happen next. In the following article Walter T. Rault reviews some of the great figures in the history of the roped ring—from the time of John Broughton, first champion of England, to Primo Carnera of to-day, the giant Italian, whose claim for the heavyweight title of the world seems likely to be fulfilled within the next twelve months.

Three of the World's Foremost Fighters

Left—Jack Dempsey, one-time heavyweight champion of the world and idol of America. His recent plucky attempt to "come back" showed that though he has lost much of the fire and dash that made him champion, he is still a fighter to be reckoned with.



Below—Gene Tunney, the "gentleman boxer." Listeners will no doubt be able to recall that thrilling relay from America when Tom Heeney, whose home-town is Gisborne, put up such a plucky fight against Tunney, then world's heavyweight champion.



Right—Primo Carnera, the Italian giant, whose huge size and immense strength, combined with an agility unusual in a boxer of his bulk, places him in the world championship class.

"THAT no person is to hit his adversary when he is down, or seize him by the ham, the breeches, or any part below the waist: a man on his knees to be reckoned down."

So ran the seventh and last of the Rules to be Observed in all Battles on the Stage (the wooden platform that preceded the canvas ring), as agreed by several gentlemen at Broughton's Amphitheatre, Tottenham Court Road, London, on August 16, 1743. And that was, roughly speaking, how it all began.

We can see them now, those several gentlemen of George II's reign, in their laced coats and sprigged waistcoats and their jewelled fobs, gathered gravely round the table in that little building in Hanway Street to settle the first recorded rules of the Ring. They took it seriously, for both money and credit in their fashionable world hung often upon the result of a mill on those railed-in boards. They were no flash mob who patronised Jack Broughton, champion of England and the most reputable of promoters and M.C.'s.

Yet they would have been astonished if they had known into what a battery of flood-lights the candle that they were lighting should one day grow. How could they even dream of the vast stadium by the Great Lakes, the crowds of pale-face 'scalpers' busy where then Red Indians hunted scalps, and 100,000 Americans gathering to watch a main battle fought for more money than anyone in England in Broughton's time had ever seen?

From Broughton's amphitheatre to the Albert Hall; what a pageant of pugilism stretches between!

GREAT fighters and tremendous fights; brilliant boxing and bulldog pluck; not a little crookedness, fights on the cross, fiascos, bad decisions, fouls; but still the game pulls itself out of the trough and rises regularly to the



heights again. From Bendigo in the eighteen-forties, with his habit of going down without receiving a blow, to Sharkey in the nineteen-thirties, with his predilection for hitting below the belt, there have been unworthy figures in the long procession, but history shows us that there are champions in plenty still to come.

Broughton himself leads them all, the first acknowledged champion of the pure art of fists alone. Close on his heels his conqueror, Jack Slack, the butcher, who won the title in 1750, and with it the winning end of the purse computed to amount to £600. After him comes Tom Johnson, the cornporter, five feet nine and fourteen stone, and hard as one would expect a man to be, who could fight with the bare fists against a man three stone heavier than himself for sixty rounds. Though one must remember, in reading of the old bare-knuckle fights, that under Prize Ring rules a round ended when a man went down, and after every round was half a minute's rest; so that a round could last any time from a minute or so, which was the average, up to an occasional quarter of an hour; and a knock-out blow was one that put a man out for more than half a minute in the hands of his seconds, instead of ten seconds alone on the floor of the ring.

IN some ways the old fights were fiercer, in some ways less exacting, than one might think if one imagined them fought under the modern rules. Far back in the history of the Ring comes Daniel Mendoza, the first Jewish pugilist, champion of England, and the first of the long line of fighting jews who had held championships all over the world. He was born in Aldgate, and there have been few periods in boxing history since when Aldgate has not had its representative in the first flight. Mendoza was the victim of one of the most curious incidents in ring history—the famous occasion when Gentleman Jackson seized him (Continued on page 9).