

# Who Will Be the Next Heavyweight Champion of the World?

*The Remarkable Story of Jack Johnson, His Early Struggles, His  
Winning of the World's Championship and a Glimpse  
of His Probable Successor*

In Three Parts

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## PART 1

### Around the World With Jack Johnson

By Alec McLean

*Bicycle Racer, Promoter, Former Manager of Jack Johnson and Present Manager of Matty Baldwin*

Ever since that disastrous day at Reno, when the hopes of the white race were dashed in the defeat of their Champion, James Jeffries, Jack Johnson has been the most prominent figure in the boxing world. His wonderful career, with its rise to prominence through a spectacular tour of the world, his winning of the heavyweight championship, and his life of fame and fortune since that time will appear in a series of thrilling sketches in the next few numbers of the Baseball Magazine.

Alec McLean, the former manager of the present Champion, who made possible his brilliant success, is the author of these sketches. They are intensely realistic, written from the personal experience and intimate knowledge of a man who knows all the ins and outs of the roped arena, who has been one of the closest acquaintances of Johnson and who answers the question so important to all lovers of the boxing game—Who will be the next heavyweight champion of the world?

**N**O man in boxing circles has been more talked about in recent years than Jack Johnson. Ever since the memorable fight at Reno, in which Jeffries made such a poor showing, there has been no possible doubt of Johnson's right to the title. However much the average white man might like to see one of his own race and color holding the most prominent place in boxing circles, it is no more than fair to admit that Johnson's title has been clearly earned. I myself am looking forward to the time when a white man will be the

acknowledged champion of the world, but that is another story and the object of this series, which I shall discuss in the final section.

My acquaintance with Jack Johnson dates back to April in the year 1903, when I was managing Sandy Ferguson. In that month, I matched Sandy with Johnson in a ten-round bout at the Central Club in Boston. Sandy, who in his prime, and when in condition, was not inferior to any heavyweight, was in poor shape, and far from fit for a match with such an acknowledged master as Johnson.

Still, he made the black heavyweight go the limit throughout the contest, and it was a more even affair than could have been fairly expected.

The late Billy Pierce, whom so many sporting men will remember, as the match-maker for the Armory Athletic Association, Boston, was at that time managing Johnson. It was with him that I made another match between Sandy and Johnson, which occurred in August of that same year.

In November of the year 1904, we again made a match between these heavyweights, this time at San Francisco. It was a scheduled twenty-round affair, and I must admit it was a very unsatisfactory exhibition. Both men were clearly off form, and neither showed the slightest championship calibre. However, the interest in a good contest between these boxers was strong enough to justify another meeting. This contest was a memorable one from many standpoints. It occurred in the following year, 1905, and was staged at Chelsea, Mass. It was a very warm night, and a large crowd attended. The excessive heat may in part explain the poor showing of both men.

Ferguson, in my estimation, with all his lack of training and poor judgment, lead Johnson during the opening rounds. In fact, I believe he was still in the lead until the seventh, when the bout was stopped, and Sandy disqualified for a foul. I was present at the meeting, and watched the bout very closely, and I can honestly say that I believe Johnson was fully as much to blame for that foul as Sandy was. In fact, Jack started it first, but as he knew a great deal more about the finer points of the game, he was not detected. Sandy, on the other hand, was too awkward and rough and lacked the finish to cover up such an act. Both boxers reeled and fell to the floor. Sandy jumped to his feet in a moment ready for the fight to continue, but Johnson refused, and the referee consequently gave the decision to Ferguson.

There were two judges as well as a referee to decide the question.

Johnson and his seconds instantly appealed to these judges, claiming that Ferguson had made a foul, and the judges, seeing it in that light, gave Johnson the decision.

It was an interesting occurrence all around, and Sandy and I dissolved our relationship after the bout.

It was not very long after this that Johnson came to me with a story of misfortune and trouble, and wanted me to manage him. I remember distinctly what he said to me on that occasion: "I know that you can get me the work, and I also know that I can beat any man in the world if only I can get the chance."

I did not at once make an agreement with Johnson. I had known him a long time, met him in a great number of different places, and under a variety of circumstances while I had been managing Ferguson. I had always found him to be a fair, gentlemanly fellow, and on the whole I liked him. Even at that time, I could see that he was an exceptionally fast, clever, and able boxer, and felt sure that some day if he trained properly, and was properly handled, that he had the skill and capacity to become champion.

In fact, the only thing that I could possibly have had against Johnson at that time, was a characteristic of his which I observed in his various meetings with Sandy. This was one of those instances where from his actions in the ring many hostile sporting writers gathered the idea that Johnson was yellow. It may have been only Johnson's excessive caution, for he was always a careful boxer, but it seemed to me from what I had seen of his work that he was not very game. Still, I knew that he was a big, strong fellow, and in those days, at least, he had what I considered very good habits. I knew even then that he was one of the cleverest and ablest fighters that ever stepped into the ring.

So after considering the proposition for a few days, I decided that the only way for Johnson to get a big reputation and the money that goes with it, would be through a tour of the world.

I had visited Australia myself some years before, knew the country pretty well, and had a fair line on the boxers in that part of the world. While I was considering Johnson's proposal, it occurred to me that it would be a good thing financially to take him to Australia for a series of elimination bouts, and from there to Europe, as I figured he could easily beat any fighter on the other side of the water. By so doing, provided our plans materialized, he could justly claim the heavyweight championship in Australia and France, and that would be a great step toward getting a bout with the heavyweight champion of the world.

James Jeffries was at that time at the height of his career, and a match with him meant a sure reputation and a small fortune. Studying the problem in this light, I decided that I ought to be able to get enough money out of the transaction to pay me for all my trouble and time, for I had faith that Johnson if only he had the chance would make good, and realize the great hopes I had of him, as indeed he has done since that date.

Acting on this impulse, I wrote immediately to a friend of mine, William Corbett, who was at that time sporting editor on the "Referee" in the city of Sydney, Australia. In due course of time I received a reply in which he offered me two fights for Johnson in that country. The amount of money, as might have been expected, was not large. Still, all things considered, I felt it to be a fine stepping stone for both Johnson and myself to greater achievements in the future. So it did not take me long to accept.

When I told Johnson the arrangements I had made for him, and the money we would both get, he was one of the most delighted men I have ever seen. He was completely carried away with the idea of such a trip, as he always had an adventurous, curious disposition, and though the amount of money we were to receive would look very small to him now, still in those days of poverty, the very thought of it made him feel like a Rockefeller.

After a good deal of trouble, we had our transportation sent us. It was in the form of two round-trip tickets reading from Boston, Mass., to Sydney, Australia, and return. In reality these tickets looked about ten yards long. When Johnson first looked at his and saw the size of it, I can remember how his eyes opened with surprise, and how taken off his feet he seemed when he said, "Lord, man, that's an awful ticket. Australia must be on the other side of the world for a man to have such a ticket as that."

After that for several days, whenever he would meet any of his friends, the very first thing he would do would be to show them the ticket, and say, "Lord, man, what do you think of that?"

When the day came for us to leave, it developed that Johnson had pawned all his diamonds. Johnson's taste for jewelry, which has been one of his most conspicuous characteristics, in the day of his success, was coming to the surface even then. He showed me his pawn tickets, calling for a total of \$172. It was wholly impossible for him to leave on a tour of this kind without his jewelry, so I asked him how much money he had. His reply threw considerable light on his financial condition at that time, when he said, "Lord, man, I have got just \$2.00."

"Well," I said, "that will never get your diamonds, but I shall tell you what I will do. You seem to be a pretty good fellow, and I am willing to divide with you for the money, and if you only do the square thing, and we both work together, in two years' time, you will be the champion of the world, and we shall both have a lot of money."

When I said this, and I was in earnest about it, Johnson looked as grave and serious as anyone I ever saw. I believe he was perfectly sincere when he said, "Well, Alec, if I do not do what is right for you while we are together, I hope I will never see my mother again."

He seemed so serious about it, that I said, "Never mind that, Jack, let's

go and I will get your diamonds for you." So we went down, presented the tickets, and got the gems, while Johnson gave me his note for what he owed me on the transaction.

We started without incident, and there was nothing to mar our journey to the Pacific Coast. Our first stopping place was at Los Angeles, where we remained for ten days. The reason for this long pause was the fact that I was trying to get a match with either Tommy Burns or Jack O'Brien, who were both in their prime. Neither one of them, however, would have anything at all to do with Johnson. This venture proving a failure, we decided to go to 'Frisco, and from there took the next boat to Sydney, Australia. Before leaving Los Angeles, however, I had made arrangements with Tom McCarey, who managed and had recently promoted the Burns-O'Brien fight in that city, to grant me an interest in the moving pictures of the bout. These pictures, I purposed to take with me to New Zealand and Australia and show them in various places.

We left 'Frisco without incident, and our first stop was Honolulu. We stopped at the Sandwich Islands for just twenty hours. That was not very long, but it was long enough, I thought, to give the first exhibition of our pictures. If we could make a little money by showing Johnson and the films in that city, it would be so much towards paying our expenses, and also give me a line on how our venture was likely to take with those interested in such sport.

We reached the city at eleven o'clock in the morning, and I spent some time in searching for a theatrical manager who was willing to stage the show for that night. This search was without result, as there was no one willing to try a venture of that kind for a single night. I finally made an arrangement with the manager of the Orpheum Theatre, explaining my proposition, but he assured me that he had closed his house for the season. After a good deal of discussion, he

finally agreed to let me stage the show myself, provided I would pay him 25 percent of all receipts. I immediately went to the newspapers and inserted some advertising in the afternoon editions, had a large number of hand bills printed and distributed, and made all arrangements to run the show for that evening. Everything was going along well until I started to look for an operator to run the machine. It was here that I encountered a real difficulty for there did not seem to be a man in the whole city competent to undertake the task. For a moment I did not know what to do. Then I decided that since I had gone so far in the proceeding, it would be almost impossible to stop without getting into a lot of trouble. All things considered I decided to take a desperate chance, and operate the machine myself. I had watched the operation often, and thought I might be able to manipulate it without committing suicide or murder. I will admit that I worried a good deal about this, but it was too late to back out, even if I had wanted to. I was too busy, however, in getting all this work done to have much time to think about the consequences.

Night came at last, and it was fearfully warm. I was obliged to set the machine up in the gallery in order to get the right distance from the stage. My advertising had brought good results, for the house was filled from pit to dome. I found myself up in the gallery among a riff-raff from the four quarters of the world,—Chinamen, Japanese, Sandwich Islanders, and anybody and everybody, who had the price of admission.

The time for starting the performance was overdue, and all classes and nationalities began to show their displeasure in a dozen or more different languages. The gist of these remarks, so far as I could understand them was, "Why don't you start the show?" It was sometime after eight o'clock, and after a good deal of trouble we did get started. I am also willing to admit that the first part of the show was very bad, for what I did not know

about operating a moving-picture machine would undoubtedly fill more than one volume.

Whenever a picture would go bad, owing to the fact that I did not know how to adjust the electric current, the crowd about me seemed on the point of starting to mob me, and as they were not at all particular how they expressed their opinions of my work, they had me a good deal upset. At times I did not know but that they would use personal violence.

During the latter part of the show, however, the pictures began to improve, and I finally succeeded in explaining to the crowd that the poor beginning was due to the electric current's not being strong enough. As I seemed sincere, and looked honest, they believed it. At least, they did not complain so much as they had been doing.

After it was all over, and we came to divide our profits, we discovered that we had cleared a little over \$400. This was the first money we had made on the trip, and it cheered us up a great deal. We left Honolulu feeling very optimistic. This feeling, I may say, continued throughout the trip, which was a very pleasant one, though slightly monotonous.

In due course, we arrived at New Zealand, landing at Auckland, where we were met by a great number of sporting writers, newspaper men and devotees of boxing. Several of the leading celebrities took us about town, and introduced us to the mayor, with whom we took tea.

From Auckland, we sailed to Sydney, a journey which proved long and tiresome. However, it had a most pleasant ending, as we were given a royal reception by all the sporting interests in that great city. It was there for the second time that we showed the pictures of the fight and we succeeded in making a very fair amount of money.

On the following week, Johnson fought his first fight in Australia with a very large negro, named Peter Felix,

as his opponent. Johnson showed his cleverness and had little difficulty in stopping his opponent in two rounds. After that successful beginning, Johnson became a great favorite with the various sporting people, who all began to clamor for a match with Bill Squires, who at that time claimed the championship of Australia. The newspapers gave the affair a great deal of publicity. Johnson's picture appeared in some sheet or other almost every day, and there was a great deal of interest.

From Sydney we journeyed on to Newcastle, where we showed the pictures. This town happened to be the home of Squires, the local champion. I shall never forget the first night that we opened our schedule. As manager of the performance, I stepped up on the stage, walked out to the footlights and started to address the people. As nearly as I can remember, I said something like this, "Ladies and gentlemen, I will now introduce to you the heavyweight champion of the world, the man whom James Jeffries and every other fighter in America, in fact, every fighter in the world, has refused to meet in the ring. Therefore I claim the title for Jack Johnson."

At that point, I brought Johnson out of the wings and introduced him to the crowd. Our reception was not very flattering. In fact, it was very much otherwise. The din must have lasted nearly ten minutes, during which time it was impossible for me to say a word or for the audience to hear. Local enthusiasm was very evident, and I could catch a good many remarks about their Bill, and what he would do to my champion. After they got tired, and when the tumult had died down so that I could say a few words, that Johnson was ready to defend his title at all times and against all comers, it did not seem agreeable to them, and they did not hesitate to show their displeasure at what I had said. However, a fight promoter has to get used to such receptions, and I

may say that I did not care as long as the affair was proving a financial success. I think, however, that I got even with this crowd before the week was over.

As we were working on a percentage basis with the house, after the first couple of nights, business began to fall off. I went to Squires and asked him if he would not like to come in some evening, and let me introduce him to the people, and at the same time, he could see Johnson in action. This would give him a chance to form an opinion of Johnson, which would be very valuable to him later.

Squires agreed with me that it would be of great advantage to him, and consented to be at the theatre on Friday night. You may be sure I had this event thoroughly advertised. It was announced that Squires would meet Johnson face to face on Friday night, and as some of the crowd thought they would put on the gloves, of course, the house was full. When the much-advertised event came, I introduced Squires and Johnson, and they shook hands before the audience on the stage. Someone in the gallery lead off with the complaint, "Aren't they going to fight?"

The only reply I made to this was "Later."

Then another riot ensued, in which there were a good many references to "Yankee tricks." However, I was beginning to get used to this, and, as I say, I did not care particularly, so long as the money was coming in. We left Newcastle with a very fair profit, and went from there to Bende-goal, where we showed a week with good success. In fact, the trip was proving more profitable than I had expected, and Johnson, as well as myself, was highly satisfied.

The following week, Johnson fought his first big bout. This was with Lang in Melbourne. It was a very interesting fight to watch. Johnson again demonstrated his all-around superiority, and had little difficulty in winning the bout inside ten rounds.

By this time, money was coming in very fast. Johnson, with characteristic thrift, used a share of his profits by investing in a new big diamond, seven different suits of clothes, and many other things. He also began to decide that he was about the whole show, and did not really need a manager at all.

