

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

PART II

The Winning of the World's Championship

By Alec McLean

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

Many rumors from across the water have assailed the ears of the sport-loving public as to the present condition of the World's Champion, Jack Johnson. While it is true that most of these reports have been the work of pure imagination, or very excessive enlargement of the truth, it is nevertheless a fact that Jack Johnson has reached his greatest efficiency, has undoubtedly passed his prime, and is headed on the downward path which awaits all champions in whatever branch of athletic sport. The great question before the American public is, "Who will be his successor?" Alec McLean, who brought Johnson out of obscurity into prominence, is fitted in every way to discuss this problem. In the present installment, he relates his personal experience with the champion up to and including the memorable occasion when he won the heavyweight title of the world.

IT was about this time that an unpleasant trait of Johnson's character began to come to the surface. As long as he was poor and struggling, he appreciated a friend who would help him, but when he saw the money coming in, he wanted it all for himself. He did not stop to remember that he had once needed someone's help to put him in the way of getting this money.

It was about this time that I had him booked for two weeks ahead, including another boxing bout. Mr. Brennan, with whom we had the con-

tract for the first two fights, came down to our hotel to pay us for the Lang bout. Johnson told him that I had gone out, but he would receive the money, and give me my share when I came back. Mr. Brennan, naturally agreeing to this, did so.

Shortly after, when I returned, in fact before Mr. Brennan had left the hotel, he said, "I didn't think you would come back so soon; and as I was in a hurry to go to the races, I gave Mr. Johnson the money. I suppose it is all right"

Johnson and I started for the races, and when on the train Johnson said, "Do you want some money, Alec?"

"Yes," I answered, "I might as well have some."

So he put his hand in his pocket and gave me a handful of gold. I counted it out, and he said, "How much more is coming to you?"

"About \$510.00," I answered, to which he only replied, "All right, wait until we get back to the hotel, and we will fix it up there."

I had no reason to mistrust him in any way, and said no more about the matter.

When we reached the hotel, however, he had arrived at a new idea. He expressed himself as being unwilling to fight any more in Australia. I asked him why, and he said, "I guess I will go back to America. I am getting tired of this country, and I can get more money there."

I tried in every way to persuade him to stay and fight the other bout as well as fill some theatrical engagements, but he absolutely refused to do so. Finding I could do nothing with him, I said, "Well, if you have made up your mind, I suppose we might as well settle up and we will get on the next boat. I would like to have the \$510.00 of my money that you have, so I can settle up these hotel bills, and we will go back to Sydney."

I thought it was peculiar when Johnson finally said, "You know it is an old saying, 'Everybody for himself in this world.' Now, I have the money, and I am out for Jack Johnson. If you are big enough to take it away from me, go ahead and do it."

I didn't want to have a scene with him there, so I told him to think it over, and we would talk about it tomorrow. The next day I went to him and asked him for the money. He still had the same story to tell that he was out for himself, and if I was big enough to get the money, to go ahead and do it.

I told him that I was probably not big enough to do it by physical

strength, but I could get the money for all that. The only reply he made to this was that I could go ahead and get it.

At first I disliked to have any trouble in the matter, and went down to see my attorney. I showed him my contract and he told me that I could have Johnson locked up. I told him to go ahead and he did. Johnson got out one night, and I was standing on the street corner. He came up behind me suddenly and struck me with his right fist on the nose, knocking me down. I did not stay down for the count, however, but immediately jumped up, took a cab and drove down to the police station. Here I swore out another warrant to have Johnson locked up again.

When the case was tried before the court the next morning I learned from my attorney that if Johnson were convicted of assault with intent of bodily harm, as he was a prize-fighter, he would probably get a sentence of imprisonment of from two to seven years.

I admit I was very sore at Johnson at this time, but I did not want to cause him as much trouble as this, so I did not appear against him.

Johnson pleaded the charge of common assault, and was fined twenty-five pounds. As I was the plaintiff, according to the laws in Australia, I received one-half the fine. In addition, Johnson was compelled to settle for the \$510.00 which he had refused to pay me.

We both sailed for America on the same ship, although I admit there was no friendly feeling between us. When Johnson was paying his money in my attorney's office the day before we sailed, he made the remark that there were two men going aboard the ship, but only one would get off alive.

Hearing this statement, my attorney advised me to arm myself, which I promised to do. This was the first and last time I ever carried a gun, and I never want to do so again.

In spite of Johnson's threats, everything went well until we struck Hono-

lulu on our way back. The minute we docked there, we were surrounded by newspaper men. They wanted a story from us concerning our trouble in Australia, as the news of this trouble had reached them even there. Johnson has always prided himself in the ring that he could make any man lead to him. This was one occasion when his theory did not work.

I let him leave the boat first, and tell his story to the press. Then I knew just what stand to take, and what to say. Johnson thought he had all the best of it, and waited patiently until the papers came out in the afternoon. When they did, I think he must have bought every paper in Honolulu or pretty nearly every one to see his story.

There were four column head lines on the first page, entitled "Johnson's Version of His Trouble with Manager McLean." Then followed his story, but under it read, "Manager McLean's Story of His Trouble with Johnson," which was followed by my view of the trouble.

When Johnson saw this he immediately rushed down to the boat and declared he would murder me at sight. I happened to be on my way down at the time, and some of the passengers who had heard him make the threat met me and told me to be careful, that Johnson had a loaded gun, and was going to shoot me at sight.

When I walked down to the boat Johnson was there, standing at the end of the gang-plank. I stood a few feet away from him, talking with some friends for about twenty minutes until the final call of "All Aboard." Then I walked directly past Johnson, so close that we rubbed shoulders, but he never said a word.

After the ship had put out to sea, and the pilot had left us, everything seemed to be all right. I was standing on the upper deck with my hand against the railing, talking with some friends, when Johnson came up with a crowd following him. When he got within ten feet of me, he asked me what I had said in the press about him.

I had my hand on my gun in my coat pocket. I told him to stop where he was, and he told me he was going to break my back.

"Did you say that I was not game?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "and I am going to make you quit right here to prove it."

Then he asked me if I had a gun, and I said yes, that it was loaded too, and if he moved I would shoot.

"I have a gun too," he said.

"Well, go ahead and get it, and I will show you you are not game, for this is the one place where I have an even chance with you."

"You are not going to shoot while I am going after it?" he asked.

"No," I answered, "Go ahead and get it."

Somebody tried to stop him, and said, "Don't go, Jack, we don't want to have anybody killed here." But Johnson went down stairs to get his gun.

He went down stairs all right, but he did not come back. In fact, he never appeared on deck again until we reached Frisco, and he did not threaten me with any more injury, either.

That was my last fight with Jack Johnson.

How Johnson won the heavyweight championship of the world has been told so many times that it is common knowledge. From the first there was no doubt of his ability to annex the title. It was merely a question of how long Burns, the then holder of the supreme honor, could sidestep Johnson's demands. Johnson, in all his endeavors to win the goal of his ambition, fought hard and played fair. He followed Burns to England and around the world, back to Australia again. Burns had, in the meantime, as will be remembered, fought and vanquished the best men in America and Europe. But with all his gameness and cleverness, his remarkably long reach and natural physical endowments, he had no chance with Johnson. When he finally consented to meet the black heavyweight he found himself opposed

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to a fighter who was greatly his superior in height and weight and as greatly his superior in skill and cleverness. Johnson had to accept hard terms to get this battle. No champion ever yet had to work harder or accept a more short-ended bargain. Burns being the champion, was in a position to demand pretty much whatever he pleased and he did demand it, too. Of a purse of thirty-five thousand dollars, he stood to receive thirty thousand, win, lose or draw. Johnson was well content with five thousand and the championship of the world.

The bout, which was staged under the management of Hugh McIntosh, was a memorable one in the annals of boxing. Johnson showed his immense superiority from the first. He merely played with the white boxer, knocking him down every once in a while, then picking him up and standing him on his feet. The fight throughout showed a remarkable trait in Johnson's character, which he later showed in his fight with Stanley Ketchel and still later in the meeting with Jeffries.

He positively would not exert himself to get a quick knockout. No one doubts that Johnson on every one of these three occasions could have put away his opponent much quicker than he did, but he would not. Whether this trait comes from his easy-going, indolent nature or a desire to make the exhibition last longer as a better success to the spectators, I cannot say. Whatever the reason he toyed with Burns until the bout was stopped to prevent real injury to the white man and Johnson was awarded a knockout, which he might have won much earlier in the bout had he so desired.

The following excellent study of Johnson's peculiar ring tactics, and his skill as a boxer is from the pen of a London sporting writer. His opinions were given on the eve of the much-

heralded Johnson-Wells bout, before it was called off. He draws a good picture of Johnson's wonderful skill and a very fair comparison between the champion and the most promising white man then in view.

Speaking of Johnson, he says:

He has a trick of knuckling down the upper arm muscles of an opponent which is worthy of the cleverest exponent of jiu jitsu, and depending as it does on an exact knowledge of the spots where the nerves approach the surface not only irritates his opponent, but also speedily destroys the elasticity of his biceps. Then again he has always made adroit use of his tongue in championship contests. His bitter sweet taunts uttered in a purring voice and with an infantile smile caused Burns to lose his temper and even impaired the imperturbability of Jeffries.

As regards the rest of his system of tactics, subtlety—amounting to obscurity—is perhaps the characteristic feature. Speed without haste and an unerring judgment of distance—finalities which distinguish the artist from the artisan in the boxer's abbreviated sphere of activity—are always apparent in his actions. So much is manifest—but all the rest is so veiled in obscurity that those who are accustomed to the plain, straightforward tactics of the English style cannot grasp the secrets of his effectiveness. They say, for example, that he has not a punch in either hand. That is because they do not see how the shifting of his weight from one foot to the other supplies all the force required for the leisurely lightning of his hooks and jabs. Again like all the best American champions and unlike our English champions, he knows that two or three comparatively light blows to the same useful spot may do more to break down an opponent's resisting power than the most spectacular punch.

For this and other reasons it is customary to say that his style is essentially defensive. The description is correct, no doubt, in so far as it implies that he leaves the bulk of the leading to his opponent. The boxer who leads must always leave himself open to some extent, and if the defender anticipates the form, of the attack and delivers his counter stroke quickly enough he gains an advantage which may, of course, prove decisive. A certain power of psychical mimicry (as though he could see into the other man's brain pan) and an extraordinary swiftness of co-operation between eye and hand enable the negro champion to gain this advantage more often than any other heavyweight boxer the writer has seen. It is astonishing how often his counter gets home before his opponent's lead; herein lies the veiled effectiveness and obscure distinction of his style.

His favorite counter is an accurate and abstruse right uppercut, a blow that apparently comes out of the nowhere into the here, and, as Burns knows only too well, is so forcible that no guard can prevent it from jarring terribly. The one weak point in his physique seems to be his stomach, that instrument of unaccustomed pleasures for a colored Texan brought up on the nutritious but unenlivening corn cake. Johnson would have us believe that he rather likes a good stiff jolt in that particular place. But he takes such pains—even in exhibition bouts—to protect it with his elbows that we must decline to regard the evidence of our eyes as a malicious libel.

In the matter of physique Wells is not, nor ever will be, the equal of Johnson. His drooping chin and swanlike neck and unprotected middle story are weaknesses which no amount of physical culture can cure completely or even conceal; they are

so manifest indeed that no opponent will ever be at a loss in devising a suitable plan of campaign against him. It must be admitted that he is no longer the spiderlike person who allowed himself to be wrestled into unconsciousness by Gunner Moir a few months ago. He has greatly improved the muscles of his neck and shoulders and abdomen since then, and as appeared in his fight with Ian Hague for the Lonsdale heavyweight belt and the championship of England, he can now take an occasional thump with equanimity. As a setoff to these too obvious disadvantages he has a very long reach and is as quick on his feet as any lightweight in the championship class, while the ease and accuracy of his punches are such as to surprise the oldest ringside critics.

There can be no doubt that he possesses a punch of unusual severity in either hand. Indeed, he should be able to hit as hard as Fitzsimmons did in his prime when he comes to his full strength. The effortless ease of his punching, the effect of which depends on perfect timing, causes the unlightened spectator to underrate the force thereof. Even Johnson will find it difficult to get past his elongated left, and is liable to be worried by the everlasting little stabs in the face—baby hits delivered with a turn of the wrist, which adds to their power of jarring the nerves—which are showered from that pistonrod of an arm. In his earlier fights some of the military boxer's characteristic faults were evident in his style; his tactics were mechanical and "according to orders," and his hits were often signalled. But he has outgrown these defects of his apprenticeship, and the element of unexpectedness is now a factor in his method which may keep even Johnson guessing at times.

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