

A Brief Survey of the Boxing World

Ring Etiquette of the Present Day—How the Various States Regulate the Game—Old Time Boxers vs. New—General Progress of the Sport

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Last month Mr. McLean recounted for us the troubles of a boxing manager. This was a glimpse behind the scenes into the intricate mazes of professional boxing which always seem so mystifying to the general public. This month Mr. McLean gives us a broad, general survey of the whole boxing world, analyzing most carefully the precise situation in every one of the different weight divisions, the problem of Jack Johnson, and the attitude of the public toward boxing, as evidenced by the laws prevailing in the States.

IN my article for THE BASEBALL MAGAZINE for last month I discussed the work of the manager in boxing. That was a subject I knew something about, from long years of experience, and believed the friendly public might be interested in a glance behind the scenes. This time I shall try to outline the exact state of affairs in the boxing world—a far harder and more complicated task, but one in which the public is still more interested.

It seems to be the prevailing opinion that boxing is fighting for its life, and that it is up before the bar of popular examination in much the same way that the trusts are being overhauled and criticised. Several powerful papers have launched on a crusade against boxing, and there are permanent elements in society who may always be counted upon to oppose the game, and whose hostility does not vary particularly from year to year. But the great mass of the community whose opinion counts in the last analysis as the deciding vote of the great majority view boxing with no greater disfavor than they have always done.

But the public attitude toward boxing is too important a thing in itself to discuss at this point. I want, rather, to glance for a moment at the present

status of the boxing world before I take into consideration the friendliness or hostility of the people.

First and foremost, now and all the time, is the heavyweight championship of the world. Never in its history has this weight been more uncertain than at the present time. And before discussing the situation I wish to say right here that in spite of all the newspaper talk to the contrary, Jack Johnson is at present the heavyweight champion, and will be until he retires definitely or is defeated. I do not think the public by any possible combination can unite to cheat the black champion out of his clearly earned title, and I sincerely believe that time will prove the correctness of my contention. In all this I have no friendly feeling for Johnson—none whatever. I managed him once, and the least I can say for him is that he caused me a great deal of absolutely unnecessary trouble. But my personal feelings and the personal feelings of anyone else have nothing whatever to do with Johnson's title. He won it fairly by defeating the man who held it before him, and by defeating as well all other white men who had a ghost of a show against him. And while he has refused to meet some good men, particularly Sam Langford, he has done no

differently here than almost all the other champions who have gone before. And, in addition, few people doubt that Johnson has been at all times more than a match for Sam Langford, marvelous fighter as the smaller man has shown himself to be. Johnson is in all respects a champion, by right and ability. It is true that people say Johnson has never defeated any really able fighter, and that is somewhere near the truth, but Johnson, for all that, is one of the greatest heavyweights who ever entered the ring, and it is no more than common justice to concede as much.

With all his great ability, it was an unfortunate day for boxing when Johnson won the heavyweight championship. The black man in many ways has been no worse than others; in some he has been better. He has, to give him his due, and that is all I propose to do, been neither an excessive drinker, like John L. Sullivan in his prime, nor a rough-house fighter like Sandy Ferguson. The negro has abstained from a good deal that has tarnished the reputation of many other boxers, but for all that he has brought boxing into greater discredit than any other pugilist who ever lived. The principal fault with Johnson, in addition to his personal irregularities of living, which are grave enough, has been his entire disregard for law of all kinds. He has shown an indifference amounting to contempt for public opinion and has disregarded any statute which curtailed his whims in any measure whatsoever. The public was willing to overlook a good deal in Johnson's case, but he has asked of that long suffering public more than it could justly stand for, and he has no one to blame but his own perversity for the difficulty in which he now finds himself.

For all that, however, Johnson is still heavyweight champion, and if any of the would-be white hopes argued the matter with him in the ring they would speedily find it out to their sorrow. That is not saying anything against the white hopes, for prospects in that quarter look more promising than for a good long while. Just now McCarty's name is on everybody's lips, and there is no discounting the fact that he has by all odds the best right to the title, such as it is. But there

is much for him to do yet to clearly establish his claim, and there is still more for him to do before he becomes the best man at the weight in the world. Still, I have much hope for McCarty. He seems to have the requisites of a coming champion. He certainly has the weight and the strength; his build is almost ideal; he seems to be a brainy fighter; he is quick, active and persevering and he is young enough to make good. But, of course, at present he would last in a ring just about as long as Johnson wanted him to last. It would be a question merely of the number of rounds the sluggish black man would elect to go before finishing the squabble. Even Sam Langford, with his much lighter build, would have to be conceded a topheavy favorite against the white man.

I say McCarty is the best man at present, but some notice must be taken of Willard. He, too, has the weight, strength and hitting power, and at New York seemed to have the better of McCarty. The latter will have to dispose of this claim before his title is any too secure. Al Palzer had the strength, weight and endurance to be a champion, and he certainly could hit. I had high hopes of him at one time, and he may make good yet, but he is not the quick thinker that McCarty has shown himself to be, and that makes all the difference in the world. Carl Morris, who was given so much publicity at one time, and who is still big and strong enough to wallop any ordinary man, never, in my opinion, had a fair chance for the championship. In the first place he started too old (he was nearly twenty-six when he began serious training), and I doubt if a man can ever make up for those lost years at that age. In addition, with all his immense size, Morris was not built right for a boxer. His weight was not well distributed. In Johnson's case the weight is all in the arms, shoulders and chest. He has one of the most perfect builds for a boxer in all the history of the ring. But Morris has a comparatively thin neck, his chest is not massive, and much of his weight goes to legs. The boxer with the slim neck cannot stand the gaff. That is one thing that is the matter with Wells, the English heavyweight. There is no doubt that he

is a tremendously heavy hitter and extremely clever, but he cannot take the punishment.

McCarty must be conceded the edge just now, and he apparently has everything. Eventually, if he keeps on, he will be in a position to defeat Johnson, even though he would not have a chance right now. And with all the talk to the contrary, I believe that Johnson will eventually enter a ring and eventually be defeated for his title in fair fight. It is more than doubtful if any club in the United States will ever give Johnson a go. I think the same will probably apply to England and her possessions, particularly Australia. But I believe Paris would be willing, sooner or later, to stage a fight of this description, and when the opportunity comes I believe Johnson will be only too glad to embrace it. He has acquired expensive tastes with his championship; he can hardly be expected to curtail these expenses as long as the money holds out, and with all possible sources of revenue from theatrical engagements at an end it is easy to see that Johnson's capital will melt away in time, no matter how much he may have laid by at the present writing. Until this time comes, if it does come, I think it would be a good idea to give Johnson a rest. If he is actually guilty of the grave offenses with which he has been charged the law may be depended upon to give him ample justice. If he is not guilty the public has no right to condemn him, as it has done, and in any case it is well to remember that any man, whatever his color, is innocent in this country until he is proved guilty. The public at best, in my opinion, has been rather hasty in their judgment against Johnson, and in any case they have been more than severe. Johnson has undoubtedly committed grave errors, and I am the last man to condone those errors, but fair play is a good thing to remember at all stages of the game. It is easy enough to jump on a man when he is down.

The light heavyweight division at present has no serious defender. Sam Langford beyond question could defend that title against all comers, if he chose, but he evidently prefers to remain in the true heavyweight ranks, where he is still able to make them all sit up and take notice

The middleweight division is in a sad muddle. McGoorty has shown himself to be probably the logical contender for the title, but Papke must be taken into account. This fighter once won from the peerless Ketchell himself, and while it seemed a while back as if he had skidded too far down the greased incline to get back again, his defeat of the French champion, Carpentier, puts him once more in the limelight. It would be a good thing if these two men should get together and settle their little differences. And, incidentally, Klaus is a good man, and one who must be conceded at least a chance.

The welterweight division is, if possible, in a worse muddle than the middle. At first sight it would be safe to say that there are no welters. Then appears Packey McFarland. Packey, whatever he may say to the contrary, is a welter. He can no longer fight at anything like the lightweight limit. Even the innovation of the New York State Boxing Commission making the weight 135, instead of 133, will hardly help Packey. His real weight is at least 138, and when he reduces below that figure he saps his strength, in my opinion. Packey must be considered a welter, and I for one do not see why he is so loath to admit it. Without much doubt he would be able to defend the title against any one in sight at the present writing.

In the lightweight ranks Willie Ritchie is the unquestioned champion. Wolgast may come back. He is a tough fighter, but in my opinion his operation for appendicitis permanently weakened him. Rivers is a comer, no doubt, and Mandot is a good man, but Ritchie is the champion. There are other contenders, but these occupy the center of the stage just now. The lightweight championship shifts oftener than any of the others, for there are a number of good boys at the weight. Incidentally, I have a good boy myself, in the person of Kid Gallant. The good people of Boston and vicinity think a great deal of Gallant. He is fast, clever, a good hitter, and he has just begun. I have been looking all my life for a young fellow whom I could develop into a winner, as I said in my last article. That is every manager's ambition, and I believe I have attained mine now. It will

not come for a year or two, of course, for no matter how good a man may be, it takes time for him to gain skill and experience; but if it doesn't come eventually I shall miss my guess.

Kilbane is truly champion of the featherweights, and won his title clearly from Abe Attell, one of the most marvelous boxers of all time. In the weights below that figure, however, there are no clearly defined champions—only a number of good boys who have not yet sorted themselves. So much for the boxers.

Now for the public attitude toward boxing, beginning with the land where it has attained the greatest prominence and popularity—the United States. This attitude is pretty clearly defined and falls logically into five main divisions:

First: Where finish fights are allowed.

Second: Where finish fights are not allowed, but where a bout may go to a decision.

Third: Where boxing is legal, but the number of rounds is strictly limited, and no decision allowed.

Fourth: Where boxing is held illegal, but is allowed to club membership.

Fifth: Where no boxing under any circumstances is allowed.

First: Where formerly many states allowed a finish fight, there are now but two—Nevada and New Mexico. Even in these two states there is grave agitation against such a practice, and New Mexico is really the only state where a bout can be staged over any route. In Nevada the limit is forty-five rounds, but that is usually equivalent to a finish, as most fights are terminated long before that time.

Second: The second great group of states where a limited number of rounds only are allowed, but where a decision can be given, are led by California. This is probably the best system. It does away with the possible dangers of the longer bouts, and at the same time permits of a clear-cut decision between two contestants. I believe ultimately most states will adopt some such system as that in vogue in California. It has certainly worked most effectively.

Third: In most of the states a system somewhat like that in operation in New York is the rule. Here boxing bouts are legal, but are limited to ten rounds, and

no decision is allowed. In Pennsylvania the limit is only six rounds. The number varies from six to twelve. Most of the states fall under this head in their attitude toward boxing. The only objection to this system is that the bouts are in many cases hardly long enough, and the lack of a decision dampens popular interest and causes a great deal of difference of opinion and a general unsettled condition in boxing. Ultimately, as the needs of the public become clear, and boxing is better regulated and better understood, I believe these rules will be altered materially to the general advantage of the sport.

Fourth: In some states—notably Massachusetts—boxing is held to be illegal, but is permitted in clubs organized for that purpose, for members only. The illegal basis of the sport handicaps it somewhat, but its popularity has resulted in a large membership to the clubs where it is permitted. Boxing under such conditions is not essentially different than in states like New York.

Fifth: In some few states all professional boxing of whatever nature is absolutely unlawful and strictly barred. Illinois is the most conspicuous example of these desert tracts in the boxing world. Inasmuch as Illinois includes Chicago, the second city of the United States, it places a considerable handicap on the sport. It is my opinion that the ban will some day be lifted in those states where boxing is under grave indictment, and that the sport will be admitted into good standing with other athletic pastimes.

Now for a word on the situation in boxing with relation to its prospects. In spite of the handicaps under which boxing labors in various states, there is not a doubt in the world that the general status of the game in every particular is far higher, far more promising than it was ten years ago. I believe without question that three times the money is now spent annually to witness boxing bouts than was spent even a decade ago. The commercialization of boxing has been its regeneration, and this commercialism is the main reason for the great popularity of the game. I say this knowing the heavy criticism which has been directed at the sport on that very account, for I consider that this profes-

sional tone of boxing has been the main cause of its prosperity.

When John L. Sullivan made the sport a favorite there was nothing to compare to the box office receipts of the present. Purses were small, and the game itself disreputable. They talk of the good old days, when champions were always ready to defend their titles with anyone at a moment's notice. It sounds interesting, but I think few people would like to go back to those good old days. It is true that champions fought then much more readily than they do nowadays; that they met and fought in a barn, if necessary, or an open field, chased from place to place by the police. It is true that they did these things and cut each other to pieces with their bare knuckles, so that the finish of every fight meant at least one, and often two, candidates for the hospital. A man did not fight very often in those days. He was in no condition to. Often he was half killed in a fight, and it sometimes took him months to recover so that he was fit to go into another. Sometimes he was through for good after a contest, and not a few boxers were killed in the ring. The bouts of those days were not boxing half as much as they were fights. The rules were so different that a bout could not help but be a fight. And they were brutal past all question. Now commercialism in boxing has done away with the good old days, with their blood and broken bones and depraved ringside crowd. The boxer nowadays is frankly looking for money, and he will take all he can get. He has no delight in maiming another boxer, or in getting maimed himself. He is a careful liver and a clean athlete. He has to be, for his business requires it. Usually he is a man of at least average, often of more than average, intelligence. Usually he is a desirable citizen who is a professional athlete and makes his money in much the same way as the professional baseball player makes his. One is adept with the bat and is a quick fielder; the other is adept with his hands and is a skillful dodger. Commercialism has made the boxer more cautious, less likely to take any and every chance that offers, and less sportsmanlike, if you look at it that way. But it has made boxing immeasurably a higher grade pastime than

it has ever been before, and that is the main thing to consider. Boxing under old rules deserved public condemnation; it was brutal and should have been abolished. The public is prone to judge an institution by its former sins. This is natural, inevitable, and boxing has suffered for its past errors. But boxing, well conducted under modern rules and modern methods, is not deserving of the public hostility and I believe the day will come, when it is looked upon as merely the simplest of athletic contests, differing in no essential particular from other athletic contests, which depend upon muscular strength and skill.

Boxing is as lucrative for its by-products as it is for the prizes to be won in the ring. Theatrical engagements now await the successful contestant, and the stage has become one of the foremost of boxing attractions. People criticize the boxer who steps aside from the roped arena to pick up a few of the golden dollars which are waiting behind the footlights. They think he is mercenary and he is. We all are. But the public fails to realize to the full, the hard, lean years that a boxer has had to pass through in order to get to the point where his brain and muscle is worth something to him. There is not one of those who talk about the boxer and his greed who would not do the same thing if the opportunity offered. And as for a comparison of the old boxers with their disregard for consequences and their fearless attitude, if they had had the same chance to get money that the modern boxer has, they would all, without exception, have taken that chance. There has been no change in the boxer except for the better. The conditions have changed, that is all.

I believe that the talk of a national boxing commission to regulate the affairs of the ring would be a decided advantage. In my opinion this is the only way that boxing can be standardized and as an addition to that idea I would suggest that an international commission would be better still. At the rate that things are going now it will not be long before boxing is on a plain with any world sport in the business. England has, of course, been the home of boxing for centuries. Several of the English dependencies not-

ably Australia, have furnished some of our greatest fighters, particularly Fitzsimmons and Peter Jackson. France is all enthused over boxing, and bids fair to develop some real champions before she is through. The sport is just beginning to attract attention in Germany and Austria and it shows signs of spreading elsewhere. Far more than baseball it is a world wide sport.

It is easy to see that an international commission could do things that no number of smaller commissions could accomplish for their regulations would apply to the whole world. Now the boxing commission of the state of New York makes regulations and bars a boxer for instance from any contest for a certain time. But its regulations are binding only within the limits of New York State. A boxer who is barred from participation in a contest for six months in New York is of course not barred anywhere else and suffers only to a limited degree. An international commission could regulate the game as nothing else could and in addition settle such disputes as the proper weight in the different divisions of the boxing world, the real title holders and particularly the world's champions. Another duty that would devolve upon such a commission would be the enforcement of something like animation on the part of the boxers. That is, it could compel a champion to meet a likely contender within a certain reasonable time or forfeit his title. In that case the boxer would not, as now, be absolutely independent. In all these ways and a variety of others an international commission could work to the best interests of the game. I believe that such a commission will be a thing of the future and that it will confer a benefit upon the sport which it would be impossible to realize in any other way.

People are prone to compare boxing with other sports and professions and this is a good working method of gauging a game. There are no accurate figures that I know of but from my personal knowledge I know there is a fortune invested in boxing equipment throughout the United States. There is nothing in the boxing world of course to compare with the expense of such a costly property as the Polo Grounds in base-

ball, but the twenty-five or more fight clubs in New York City alone are housed in buildings designed and given over to that purpose, that mount in cost well into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. And taking into consideration the equipment in other cities it is easy to see that boxing requires for its accommodation an outlay of capital which entitles it to a high rank in the sport world, a rank in which it probably yields to no other save baseball only. As for the crowds which attend a boxing contest, of course such crowds are strictly limited, as compared with baseball attendance. But on the other hand the admission averages much higher, the lowest figures usually being one dollar as compared with 25 cents in baseball.

The world's series games were great money makers and the receipts from a single contest amounted to a fortune. But the world's series games were the high water mark of baseball prosperity and they have nothing to offer in comparison with the receipts of the Johnson-Jeffries fight, the most profitable single venture in sport history.

There are probably from a hundred to a hundred and fifty boxers in the United States who may be called reasonably successful. These boxers will average from \$2,500 to \$50,000 a year or more. They cannot all be champions and of course the champions are the ones who get the big money. But in addition to these boxers there are a vast and indeterminate number of other boxers who either are new comers or has-beens and who pick up a good deal of money, comparatively, by preliminary bouts, as training partners, and the like. The boxer, on the whole, has far greater prospects than the baseball player, and receives a far greater income. The highest priced ball player receives, on common report, \$10,000 a year. It would not be hard to find a score of boxers who beat that figure, some of them many times over.

It is hard to estimate the number of people who attend boxing bouts, but although I am willing to concede that it is less than the number who attend baseball games I doubt if the King of American Sports is paid a greater tribute in the course of a year than the supposedly less popular sport of boxing.