



Behind the Scenes in Boxing

The Manager and His Troubles—What Sort of a Person
He Is—What He Works for—How He Works—
And What He Gets Out of It All

IN TWO PARTS—PART I

By ALEX McLEAN

Boxing Manager and General Sport Promoter.

The following article by Alex McLean, the well-known boxing promoter of Boston and elsewhere, is the first of a series which the Baseball Magazine will present to its readers during the Winter months. It has been the fashion for some time of late, to shower all manner of abuse upon boxing. It is usually a simple matter to inaugurate a campaign of wholesale denunciation against an institution which has some defects apparent enough. In our opinion it is such a campaign which is at present finding expression in the columns of the more hysterical members of the press, and it is just such wholesale denunciation as this which acts as the most favorable support imaginable to an institution thus assailed. Whether our readers agree that boxing is a perfectly legitimate athletic sport or an utterly indefensible outrage of public decency, we

know they are sportsmen enough to give this much criticized pastime the benefit of an unprejudiced trial. We know they are too fair to condemn a game wholly upon the testimony of its enemies. The following series, while by no means aimed to champion the cause of boxing, does aim to reveal something of the inner workings of this once great and still popular sport.

IN all its history boxing has been knocked. Other games have been criticized such as football, for instance, but boxing has always been the "goat" of the sporting world. Where some other sport has taken one sound drubbing, boxing has taken a dozen or twenty.

Why this is so I don't pretend to be able to say. I suppose there must always be something for well meaning people to howl about and it might as well be boxing as anything else. Later on I shall take up the subject of this public hostility and try to show where, in my own opinion, it is wrong, or at least very much exaggerated. But in the meantime I am going to talk about the manager and his troubles, for that is an angle of the situation that I know something about.

And without any boost to boxing as a game or as a profession I shall say a few words on this subject as well as I can, merely asking from the public who read this, that they remember that boxers and boxing managers are at least human beings with very much the same ability, ambition, and general outlook on life as the average person.

The boxer, whatever people may think of him, is well known. His reputation may be good, bad, or indifferent, varying with the individual case and depending upon the viewpoint of his friends and enemies. But whatever his reputation he is more talked about and better known than the average United States Senator. His manager, on the other hand, is known only in a vague and casual way. He has no notoriety of his own. He merely shines in the success, or disappears in the failure of the boxer he is managing. He is generally the real power behind the throne. It is he who makes the boxer more than the boxer makes him. But for all that he is hardly spoken of save as a necessary evil, a partner in the business, who really cuts but a small figure and whose presence is tolerated more than appreciated.

The average manager knows all this, but he seldom has time to let it bother him. He may sometimes regret that about the only place where his name is ever mentioned in the press is in relation to some trouble he may have had with his difficult job. In the main, however, he realizes that it is all a part of the game and keeps on sawing wood. He has his share of troubles and they are very real ones. But he also has his shares of hopes and ambitions and there is enough adventure, by the way, to make his daily lot an exciting one.

The boxing manager, whatever he may or may not be, is no fool. If he were he would not last long in a field which attracts some of the keenest, most active minds in the whole sporting world. It is no easy task to take the typical boxer with all his wayward tendencies and headstrong peculiarities and push him by main strength into a prominent position against the competition of many other keen promoters who are backing boxers with perhaps greater natural gifts. It requires a good deal of diplomacy to keep things running smoothly and a very good degree of business intelligence. And that the public may understand just what sort of a man makes a good boxer-manager, I will tell them a few of the qualifications that I consider necessary.

In the first place, the successful manager must have some personality. His business requires him to travel all over the United States, perhaps all over the world, and he is on the road much of the time. During this time he is constantly meeting people and if he is to get along he must be able to impress these people favorably. It is ruinous to his prospects to antagonize the men upon whose favor his prosperity depends. Many a manager whose talents otherwise were good has been heavily handicapped by his lack of tact in meeting the people with whom he has to deal.

Second: A manager must be a good press agent. He must have a wide acquaintanceship among newspaper men

and he must be able to furnish these men with interesting items of his particular boxer, items which will be worth printing. Publicity is certainly the life of boxing. Without it no manager can get very far. There is, I believe, no more complicated task than that of a successful press agent. The manager not being a press agent by training, and being able to give but a small part of his time to that important work, must still, in spite of his lack of advantages, show at least some of the qualifications which go to make up the successful press agent.

Third, the manager must be a keen man of business. There is no line in the world in which a better judgment of human nature is needed than in managing boxers. A man in this capacity is continually coming in contact with shrewd promoters and it is absolutely necessary for him to be a match of his antagonist in any of the deals in which he becomes involved.

Fourth: The manager must be a thorough student of the game. He cannot know too much about boxing. Above all, he must keep well posted on the different boxers at the weight he is promoting. He must know all about their style of boxing, their records, their training condition up to date, and their managers. If he uses the opportunities he has, to match with these different men at the right time he is a winner. But he cannot afford to make mistakes. If he is making a match with the cleverest men in his class he has to be clever himself to see that his own boxer is able to meet this man on an equality. Otherwise he is taking a chance on a dangerous black mark against his record in the shape of an adverse decision.

Fifth: A manager must have a very fair knowledge of the best methods of physical training. Personally, I never want to handle a boxer whom I do not train myself. I work out an exact schedule which covers his day in the training season almost as exactly as the schedule of a bank. A boxer under my care has so much time to sleep, so much for physical exercise, of various kinds. He is allowed to eat certain things in certain proportions at certain times and not otherwise. It is a careful and exact science which regulates physical training and a man has to study this science all

the time to bring his man to the highest degree of physical efficiency.

Sixth: A manager has to have a cool head and a quick thinking brain at the ringside. It takes only one punch rightly placed to win or lose a championship. There is but a step sometimes from the height of success to absolute failure. Corbett was winning at Carson City when Fitzsimmons landed his famous solar plexus punch, a punch which gave him the championship of the world. The examples of this kind could be multiplied without end. The manager who sits at the ringside and sees the luck going against him must solve the perplexing defense of his opponent at once and discover some good method of outpointing him. Many a boxing bout is won in the minute's intermission between the rounds when the manager has decided upon an entirely new campaign and has hurriedly whispered his instructions to his boxer. And on the other hand, many good boxers are prevented from winning by the wrong advice of their coaches. The work which a manager does at the ringside is a place where quick thinking and rapid acting shines. What he does here has to be done rapidly or not at all. Incidentally, his ringside generalship is about the most important work he does.

Seventh: I consider that one of the important traits of a good manager is to be game. When things are going against him it does no good to criticize conditions and lay the blame on the referee. The wise manager smiles at adversity. No matter how he may feel, he puts the present defeat behind him and plans for the future success. Once winning, there is nothing which succeeds like success. When things are all coming his way it is easy pickings for the manager. But even here he must be careful not to become over-confident and he must be cautious to stamp out any signs of this tendency on the part of his boxer.

This will give a rough and general view of the qualifications which the manager needs in his business. There are more of them but these are the main ones, and even from this little list I believe it will be easy to see that the boxing manager must have a fair share of this world's intelligence.

My own experience as a manager dates



“They wore heavy belts, which they took off and wrapped around their knuckles”

back some eleven years ago when I was trying to make a living in the athletic game myself at my own particular specialty of bicycle riding. My brother Hughie and I were getting along very well, but I could clearly foresee that in my own case it was only a matter of a short time before I would have to seek some other livelihood. Bicycle racing is a game for a young man, a game in which an athlete needs all the legs he has, and needs to have them in the best possible condition, and my own legs were beginning to feel the effects of a good many strenuous rides.

One day Hughie and I were practicing different athletic stunts in the gymnasium we frequented when Sandy Ferguson blew in with his usual tale of woe. Sandy at that time was young and hale, and he seemed to have all the confidence in the world in his own ability. He was at that time hardly more than a preliminary boxer who picked up a little spare money in a crude, casual way and

had a reputation as an athlete of remarkable physical development and possible prospects more than for any good showing he had actually made. Sandy at once started in talking in his usual modest way about the different heavyweights he could lick if he could ever get matched with them, and he ran the gamut from the champion of the world down. Sandy in his own estimation was able to clean up a whole roomful of boxers as he said, “just like eating apples.” I can’t say I was much impressed with Sandy’s high opinion of himself, but I was impressed with his remarkable fighting build and his confidence seemed to be what a boxer would need to carry him along the road to success. After he had gone Hughie and I talked things over. I said to Hughie: “Sandy has a great build for a fighter, and he seems to think he could lick most of the heavyweights in the business, and maybe he could at that.” “Maybe he could,” said Hughie. And from that time I began thinking serious-

ly of trying to bring Sandy out and make a good boxer of him. Sandy was very willing to have me do this—in fact, he asked me repeatedly to manage him, and we finally came to an agreement.

That was my initiation into the managing business, and I doubt if anyone ever had a more difficult proposition to handle than Sandy proved to be. Still, we started out well enough. Sandy had a good punch from the first, and while he was not very skilful with his hands when I first knew him, he was big enough and strong enough to overpower any ordinary heavyweight by sheer strength. Our first real match was with a boxer named Shaw, who had a good local reputation. Sandy gave him one punch with his husky right arm and it was all over but the referee's count. I had high hopes of Sandy at that time, and have always maintained that he had natural talents enough to win for him the heavyweight championship of the world. Sandy failed to make the most of himself—but the melancholy story of that failure I have already outlined elsewhere.

In my career as a manager I have had a number of boxers in tow, but I believe one of the oddest specimens of humanity that I ever came in contact with was a local fighter by the name of Payne. He had been in his time a fair fighter, and ranked with the light heavyweights. I kept him around my training headquarters as a sparring partner, and he did fairly well. I had a bout on at the Armory A. A., Boston, but the boxer whom I was backing at that time hurt his hand just before the date set for the encounter, and I had to call it off. It was not much of a bout at that, and I told the matchmaker of the club that he might give me a chance to make a little money to cover what I would lose in my training expenses by putting on Payne. The matchmaker had several heavyweights in tow and he was very willing to help me out to this extent. Payne was overcome at once with the dignity of his position, and refused absolutely to fight the one man in the bunch that I had picked out as the one he stood the best chance of being able to lick. Payne would have none of this arrangement, but insisted on meeting the biggest man in the crowd, a huge dockyard employee who stood about six feet three and

weighed all of 220 pounds. "Match me against that guy," said Payne. "I could lick him." I reasoned with him, but without effect. He insisted that the "bigger they were the harder they fell," and he seemed so sure about it that I said: "Well, you've got to fight him, I haven't," and let him have his way. I noticed, however, that when they came together in the ring Payne sat in his corner eyeing his antagonist, and that considerable of his ambition seemed to ooze out of him. His feet were beginning to chill. They were quite cold when the referee called time and the men came together in the center of the ring. The big husky swung at Payne as if he wanted to kill him at the first blow, and Payne by the use of considerably more speed than I had ever seen him employ before, managed to duck the blow. The glove just missed the top of his skull, but the mere wind of the blow was enough, and Payne flopped over on his back in the ring and lay there till the referee had counted nine. He managed to live through the round and sat in his corner with his teeth chattering during the minute intermission. I stuffed him with all the good advice I could crowd into sixty seconds, but this time Payne was not so fortunate. The dockyard hero gave him a tremendous wallop, and Payne remained in a comfortable position on the floor and allowed the referee to count him out. I was very much disgusted, and got out of the door as fast as I could, but I had scarcely left the building when Payne was after me for his share of the money. I told him that he had an awful nerve to come around with his hand out after putting up such an exhibition as he had just staged, but Payne's sensibilities were never over acute, and he wanted his money. Finally, after considerable wrangling, I gave him nine dollars. I knew that whatever I gave him he would want a dollar more, for that was his invariable custom. He took the nine dollars readily enough, but he kept his grimy hand extended and insisted that he ought to have a dollar more. I asked him what he wanted another dollar for and he said he wanted to buy some beans. I thought nine dollars ought to buy beans enough to last him for a while, but he insisted. So I gave him the extra dollar

to get rid of him as I had intended to do all along¹.

If a manager has any sense of humor there are many things which occur in his daily routine to break the monotony, but on the whole his life is a constant round of worry and anxiety, with a good many more disappointments than triumphs.

The most prominent boxer I have ever managed (that is, prominent some time ago) was Jack Johnson. I have already given a rough sketch of our tour in the Far East, where Johnson won the championship of Australia from Lang and advanced well on his way toward the championship of the world. Many people have said that Johnson lacked a punch, but I have direct evidence to the contrary. I have a scar on the bridge of my nose now, and I had two black eyes for some little time when Johnson let loose a right swing on me after we had had some trouble over financial matters. I went down all right, though I didn't think for the full count of ten, but, believe me, Johnson has some punch. It cost him some little money before he was through, and I might, if I had wished to push the case, have had him put in jail for a long sentence, but although there was no excuse for his conduct I felt that he was in a foreign country and that it was hardly sportsmanlike for me to get him into serious trouble, and as he had to pay handsomely for the assault he made on me I was willing to let it go at that.

It was during this trip to Australia that we visited the famous tavern at Sydney called "The First and Last." This place is built on the end of a pier and gets its name from the fact that it is supposed to be the first place where a newcomer to the country gets a drink as well as the last place he gets one when he is leaving. It was in the square near this pier that I witnessed a stirring battle which had any other athletic encounter I ever saw backed completely off the boards.

There were a number of warships anchored in the harbor, and a party of Russian sailors had gone ashore and were drinking the health of the Tsar in whatever brand of beverages came handiest. This might have been all well enough had it not been for the fact that a party of English sailors were also ashore and

also drinking the health of various persons not including the Tsar. These two groups of law-abiding citizens happened to meet in the square and proceeded at once to demonstrate the comparative importance of the British and Russian empires. The English were decidedly in the minority, and the party of the Tsar was making rapid progress when a large body of American sailors who had been doing up another part of the town and were also drinking the health of the United States Government came on the scene. They joined forces at once with the English sailors, and between them the Russians were more decisively beaten than they were by the Japanese in the recent disturbance in the Far East. These sailors fought with a zest and enthusiasm which did credit to their athletic training. They wore heavy belts, which they took off and wrapped around their knuckles, leaving the buckle in a conspicuous place. I have seen many encounters with four-ounce boxing gloves, but for real execution the patent boxing gloves of these sailors had any other kind completely backed off the boards. Sailors must have cast iron skulls, for the blows they gave each other and the way they cut each other up with those buckles would have killed any ordinary man. As it was, there was considerable evidence of personal disagreement when the police from various sections of the city managed to unite forces for the preservation of law and order and cleared the square. I don't think anyone was actually killed, and I consider that the most surprising part of the event.

Yes, the manager has a rather adventurous life, and sees a good many interesting things in the course of his travels, but the bulk of his work is merely a tiresome routine, not much different from the monotonous round of ordinary business. Having come in contact with some young boxer, it is the manager's place to decide whether or not in his opinion the young fellow has natural ability enough to become a success. In this examination the manager has to use all the sound judgment which a baseball manager uses in sizing up the ability of a bush-leaguer. If the manager thinks his young athlete has the stuff, he makes some sort of a contract with him and immediately starts to work to develop

him as a boxer. No teacher in the public schools gives harder or more consistent effort to teaching a pupil than a manager does to train a boxer. As I have said, he supervises everything the boxer does, laboriously goes over with him every detail of the game, studies his physical condition, and tries in every way to instill in him a real knowledge of the sport.

All this time he is reaching out through the channels which are open, trying to get chances for his boxer to show what he can do. At first all he can expect is in the nature of preliminary bouts, and these, of course, pay very little and give no glory. They are only a step in that hard road which leads from nonentity to notoriety. After his boxer has taken part in a score or more of these cheap bouts and has shown that he possesses real ability a manager may then hope to match him with some third-rate fighter of more than preliminary prominence. Step by step in this hard and laborious way he advances until he has become one of the leading men at his weight. Now more than ever the good manager is working every line which is open to him to boost his boxer to the championship, for the title of being acknowledged the best man at his weight in the world is the goal of every boxer's ambition. When a boxer has arrived at a point where he is one of the group of possible contestants for the championship the manager must move more cautiously than ever. While he wishes to have his boxer meet and defeat all the other men at his weight, he is just as anxious not to have him defeated at the hands of any other contestant, and so he picks and chooses his matches with the utmost care, studying the condition of a possible opponent no less closely than his own. He must be sure that his boxer is in the best possible condition and that there is no advantage in favor of his opponent. All this time, of course, he has to deluge the press with notices of his boxer and strive in every way to keep the public informed as to his ability. He also has to keep constantly in touch with all the leading clubs which may be in a position to offer

a contest, and in his dealings with these clubs he must have his business eye developed to its keenest power. Having once made a contract with a club he is then more careful than ever to have his man trained to the minute and see that no accident happens to him at the last moment. Then when he arrives at the club he usually supervises the sale of tickets to be sure that his own share of the gate receipts are looked after. His work at the ringside is more strenuous and exciting than ever, for he is a large factor to the last in the success of his boxer. All these things necessitate a rigorous course of training at various lonely roadhouses, an entire absorption in work which leaves small time for outside diversions. It is a serious business, the pushing of an unknown boxer from obscurity up to the highest pinnacle of his profession, just as serious an undertaking as it is to win the greatest possible success in any business. A boxing manager works as hard, uses as much brain, energy and effort and is as fair and honorable in his dealings as the average successful business man.

There are a number of good boxing managers just as there are a number of prominent baseball managers. Billy Delaney was one of the most noted of managers in that he brought out two men who won the heavyweight championship of the world, James Corbett and James Jeffries. The manager fortunate enough to bring out a champion is the highest type of success, and the manager of a heavyweight champion is of course the foremost manager of the game. Delaney, as I have said, brought out two champions and was one of the shrewdest, most capable men the game has ever known. Billy Nolan, the present manager of the new lightweight champion, Ritchie, has also had a most successful career, and there are a number of others whose abilities ought perhaps to rank with those I have mentioned. That particular phase of a manager's work, the criticism of his calling, as well as the present status of boxing in the United States, I shall leave to a more general talk in the next installment of this article.

(The next installment of this article will deal with the present status of boxing in this country.)