

Unique Blows and the Part They Have Played in Boxing History

The Patented Wallop Half Fact, Half Fancy—Its Importance a Good Deal Overrated—It did Exist, However—One of the Oddest Features of the Ring

By ALEC McLEAN

There is a fascination about new blows in boxing. It appeals to the imagination to feel that a great fighter was laid low by some special wizardry of motion, some elusive twist of the muscles and tendons in the slugging arm of his opponent. While it is true that success in boxing depends mainly on straight-away methods: that is mere skill, strength and endurance, it is also true, as the following instructive sketch illustrates, that many famous champions of the ring have had their favorite blows, unique with their originators and initiated with ill success by rivals.

THE press agents don't work the columns with weird tales concerning the invention of new and terrible blows by their proteges—that is, they don't work them half as much as they used to do. A few years ago no fighter went into training for a battle without at least one wonderful blow being invented in his camp—a punch that was sure and certain to daze or down its recipient, and which no human cleverness could avoid. Sportdom for a while would get all worked up over these deadly novelties, and when the gong rang would lean forward breathlessly to see which man would first get in his own direful specialty. Then, seeing nothing but the same old swings, jolts and drives, they would reluctantly and shamefacedly admit that they had been kidded along—and would watch it out while the old-fashioned wallops were given ample occupation.

As time wore on the press agent stuff went at a discount—the fans only hooted at the mention of a new blow—and the

press agents, taking a tumble to themselves, cut out the faking in that one particular. As an honest fact, the difference between one man's right or left-hand blow and the smite dealt by another is usually the simple difference in their general anatomy—a short, stocky boxer will surely hit differently, even when executing the same class of punch, from a tall, rangy fighter. Each man, too, gets his own way of hitting, just as different people hold a pencil differently, and 97 per cent. of the blows struck are the same stuff that everybody has been using for many and many a year.

The coming of the fat glove and the abolition of both bare knuckle and skin-glove fighting changed the battling style, but not the blows themselves. Under the London rules, with bare hands, or when fighting with the skin-tight gloves, the men jabbed, hit straight, or used very short hooks at close quarters. They didn't swing; they didn't fire wild, round-arm blows at the enemy—but such

blows were in stock and were used in practice bouts with the mittens. These old fighters took no chances with their hands—a jab was not likely to break up the paws, and a bare-hand swing, landing on the head or elbow of the opposition, meant shattered knuckles. That was one reason for the great duration of the old-time battles—it takes a long time to vanquish a strong, well-trained man with nothing heavier than short jabs or straight counters.

The fat gloves gave the fighters a good chance to swing, and the clever jab sank into disuse, excepting with men of exceptional accuracy in sharpshooting. Half-swings, enlarged hooks, even round-house whacks launched from the heels, came into vogue. Hands break, even with the big gloves, when a specially vague swing hits the top of an ivory head, but the boys take the chances, and keep battering away. But all these blows, whether straight or curved, are the same old stock, and vary only with the variations of the men themselves—seldom is a new blow originated or tried more than once or twice after its invention.

Most effective blows win out, not because of any novelty in their construction, but because their delivery is masked by some specially clever tactics on the part of the fighter. An old blow, sent through as a surprise party, is always a winner if the other fellow has been fooled—attempts at new blows usually fail because the fighter himself is uncertain just how to send them against a dangerous foe, and cannot take the time to figure out the proper application. In a hurry, therefore, the boxer always falls back on the swing of our daddies, and forgets any new wallops by the second round. About the only time you will see any really new blows offered is when one man has the other thoroughly conquered, and can risk experimenting as the fray goes on.

Stanley Ketchel's terrible shift was not a new blow, but a crafty way of delivering an old one. He drove his right hand forward, making the play so transparent that the other man could always stop it; then, turning on one foot and bringing the left side of his body forward, he shot the left glove to the body or jaw with tremendous vigor. The

shift employed by Bob Fitzsimmons, also a winner, was on the same principle, but looked more spectacular because Fitz twisted his huge shoulders as he changed the basis of attack.

Billy Papke's "loop-the-loop"—his glove coming up over the other man's arms when locked in a clinch—was only an uppercut without a clear space to deliver it in. It lacked the force of a clear uppercut, but was annoying to the other half of the sketch.

Joe Choynski did have a patented blow of his own. In a clinch Joe would lightly rest his thumb on the enemy's chest and make some playful remark to get his attention—then he would revolve the hand and sink the base of the palm deep into the ribs or diaphragm. Kid McCoy's corkscrew punch was only the turning of the hand as the fist alighted, and McCoy practised it till his wrists were coiled with wire sinews and he could twist the glove with inconceivable rapidity.

Shorty Ahearn, a colored fighter who never got beyond the second flight of welterweights, had a specialty only possible to a man of his short stature. Coming into a clinch, he held his right arm vertical, glove tip almost under his own chin, and then slid the arm up the taller man's chest, almost taking his head off when it came to rest. George Chip, the Lithuanian who lately sprang into prominence by two knockouts of Frank Klaus, has what he calls a delayed punch, starting the fist, then apparently giving up all idea of finishing that particular attempt, and suddenly completing the smash.

A youngster named Halstead, as yet little known to fame, recently invented a really new blow, and has won several small purses with it. The blow may be called "the return from an uppercut," and is a pippin. Usually when an uppercut misses the deliverer thereof falls into a clinch, or backs off, guarding against a counter. Halstead, as his uppercut misses, turns the hand over, so that the palm is toward the enemy, and rakes downward over his nose. It is an extremely hard blow to block, and highly annoying to its recipient.

Bud White, another little pug of, as yet, small renown, has a patented blow. Springing in air like a bantam rooster,

he shoots a straight left at a downward angle, and actually lands before his feet touch ground. I have seen lots of straight lefts, but never an aerial one like that fellow's.

Aurelio Herrera had a deadly specialty, but it was really only a straight right, and the Herrera patent lay in the masking of it rather than in the blow itself. Keeping the right arm coiled as though he feared to risk it, Herrera pecked and punched feebly with a wholly harmless and infantile left. The other fellow would pay attention to that left—and then, with incomparable speed, Herrera's right would drive home and the referee would say a lot of numbers.

Charlie Mitchell, the great English fighter, had a body blow that was his own invention—a reversed stomach punch. He held his right arm across his own belt, thumb inward, the arm parallel to the belt, and then sank the base of the glove into the other gent by a swift raking sweep. Not a fighter now living ever employs that blow, and it is a darling with a little practice.

A thoroughly effective blow that seems to be forgotten, but was formerly employed by several warriors, is a hard shove of the hand, open, at the throat. The finger ends, even cased in the big mitten, will inflict an awful lot of dam-

age on jugular or larynx, and three such shoves will do for lots of people. A few other novelties have been shown now and then, but, as stated previously, most effective wallops are merely the old blows, masked and held in ambush by exceptionally clever tactics prior to the delivery.

P. S.—Ever hear a fight announcer trying to announce a ball game? Unique and curious. Goes about like this:

"Gents, the wind-up will be—wotcha say, bo? Ladies? Who let'em in? We don't stand for no wimmen at our place—ladies an' gents, the wind-up will be a nine-round contest, straight rules, between the Reds, well an' favorably known to yuh all, an' the Battlin' Joints, champeens uv N'Yawk. Kindly don't coach the fighters, an' don't applaud 'cept with yer hands, fer the authorities is here, an' they have guv it out that there ain't tuh be no disorder. Anybody what can't remember tuh be a gent can go out to the ticket office right now an' get his money back. The referee will be Buck Brennan—huh, two of 'em? Oh, yes. The referees will be Buck Brennan an' Kid Eason, two square an' honust sport-in' men; this bout will be fer the champeenship uv Hubbuken an' Joisy City, an' may the best gang win!"

