

Fitzsimmons and the White Hopes

How Lanky Bob and the Rest of the Big Four
Sullivan, Corbett, Jeffries—Would Have Gob-
bled Up the White Hopes of To-day

By WILLIAM A. PHELON

These are effete and decadent days in white heavy-weight circles, and the rule of the black man bids fair to be long continued. Jack Johnson, it is true, recently was nearly toppled from his throne, but the would-be usurper was several shades blacker than John Arthur, himself. O tempora! O mores! When will a white man arise to regain the crown that was lost at Reno? In this article Mr. Phelon tells why “white hope” is a misnomer when applied to the present crop of Caucasian heavies, pointing out what would happen to these aspirants if a Fitzsimmons were turned loose among them.

GR**EAT** fighters are like great soldiers. Sometimes the land is full of wonderful commanders, and wars become marvels of skill, strategy, and brilliant brainwork. Sometimes there is a startling dearth of capable generals, and when a real colossus of military acumen arises, he conquers empires, and rules in tyrant glory till up from nowhere comes a general to displace him. During the campaigns of Louis XIV, so the records say, there were more great commanders, and more evenly matched, than is usual in many fighting generations. Condé, Turenne, Montecuculi, Tilly, Wallenstein, Gustaf Adolf, Cromwell, and Prince Rupert were all contemporaneous, or nearly so, and every one of them was of championship class—a man who would have been contending for the world’s honors had he turned his attention to the boxing game. Fifty or sixty years later the crop of generals had run down to seed, and Marlborough loomed up as the only champion. Charles of Sweden created a mighty stir at the other end of Europe, but his finish showed that he was only a flash in the pan, while Marlborough towered over them all.

Napoleon found the field miserably stocked with hopes. The little Corsican, doubtless, owed much to his sagacity, his bravery, and the desperate fighting material that followed him to battle. Nevertheless, it is evident that he had a wretched gang of tenth-rate generals to oppose him, even when provided with vast armies. Napoleon’s career, for years, was like that of a Stanley Ketchel let loose among the present gang. Then, when he grew old, and fat, and tired, and his hands—his legions—had been broken and ruined by many fights, he fell before the assault of Wellington.

Our Civil War found the American circuit well provided with good material—young generals who soon showed their class, and did corking good work for four seasons. Grant and Lee were the Jeffries and the Fitzsimmons of the war—a destructive plodder, with superior weight and endurance to carry him, pitted against a brilliant strategist and hard hitter, who was too light and slender to go the finish route. A few years later the German heavyweight champion, Von Moltke, found both Austria and France pitifully shy on championship timber,

and knocked out the best of their seventh-rate stock with short hooks in the first round. Thus it has been in history, and thus it has been in the fighting game.

THE MIGHTY FOUR

The present crop of white hopes looks really absurd to a man who saw the Mighty Four: John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Jim Jeffries. Some of our best boxing critics maintain that the present gang are just as good as they were ten years ago—that may be, for the heavyweights fell into innocuous desuetude, so to speak, just about 1904—but I can't see where they were as good as fifteen years ago. Go back a few years further, and, even with the terrifying John L. Sullivan in control, there were many superb performers in the heavy class—men of a totally different make and pattern from the white hopes of to-day. These men would have waltzed through the present herd like bears through a sheep-fold, and would have really felt ashamed to take the money.

The white hope—if you might call him so—of Sullivan's time was no relation to the 1914 breed, not even in appearance. Nowadays, every manager who has unearthed a white hope brags mainly of his enormous size. "My man is 6 feet 4, and weighs 245 pounds," is the one and only argument they seem to use when proclaiming the virtues of a new protégé. They seem to think that a champion must be a mastodon—that he must be at least as large as Jim Jeffries, last of the great white champions—and any boxer round the 170-pound mark is regarded with pity and derision by these impresarios. It is the Reign of Fat—not even the Reign of Beef and Brawn—and these elephants are a sight to look upon. They are immense, bovine, amiable-faced young men, clumsy and shambling, falling over their own feet—the sort of monsters whom the old-time football coaches used to hunt up and smuggle into college to play guard positions. The strength is there, of course, but they don't know what to do with it. They can hit a dreadful blow, but they don't know how, when, or where to hit it. What earthly good are they, excepting to wallop one another?

IN SULLIVAN'S TIME

The second-flight or second crop fighters of Sullivan's time were far smaller than the white hopes of to-day—usually somewhat older in years, generally adorned with a mustache, and with fierce, predatory faces—not the slightest resemblance to the amiable bovines of the present period. These men graded from 170 to 190 pounds in weight, and were usually built just about proportionate to weight, from 5 feet 10 to 6 feet in stature. They had been trained in a rough school, full of hardships and desperate adventures. Fighting with the skin-tight gloves; fighting on the turf or in secluded barns; battling for tiny purses; dodging sheriffs and police; striving for 70 or 80 rounds; bartenders, perhaps, by trade, between battles, and bartenders in places where a barkeep had to be a warrior—such was the life of these mustached, fierce-eyed, half-savage scrappers. Strange indeed, that, with a smaller population, with less money to be gained, and that only to be obtained by harder work; with skin-gloves and board floors, instead of fat pillows and padded rings—strange indeed that there should have been so many of them while there are so few really good ones to-day!

Sullivan was supreme, of course, with Charlie Mitchell and Peter Jackson his chief competitors in glory. The second flight included such as Dom McCaffrey, Joe Lannon, George Godfrey, Jake Kilrain, Patsy Cardiff, Pat Killen, Bill Bradburn, while Joe McAuliffe, of San Francisco, was the only one that classed, in height and bulk, with the white hopes of the present era.

Bring back any of these men, as he was when best, and turn him loose on the modern white hopes—oh, what a scattering there would be! These men had iron frames, superb endurance, good tactics, and actual generalship in battle—they could hit hard, and they were splendid judges of distance, seldom swinging wild, and shooting in their blows with keen accuracy. And, be it specially noted, although these men were barbarians, savage warriors of a savage period, they had a glorious sense of honor and fair play. In fifty fights among these men there would be fewer foul blows

struck than in three short bouts among the white hope brigade.

OLD-TIME WHITE HOPES VS.
NEW

It is my opinion, as above outlined, that any one of these men, the second-classers of Sullivan's heyday, could have plowed through the present staff of hopes like an axe through a cheese. This being the case, how would the 1914 flock have stood against Fitzsimmons? For Bob Fitzsimmons was the undoubted master of all these pugilists, big as well as small. Nobody, in that epoch, nobody who saw this flock of battlers in the ring, ever doubted that Fitz could have trimmed them all. Peter Maher was one of the last samples of that particular fighting breed, and we know what Bob did to Peter. True, it has been argued that Peter did not possess the glorious gameness that sustained the others, but gameness didn't count when Bob Fitzsimmons hit you fairly. I saw Peter make as game and resolute a battle with Gus Ruhlin once as was ever seen in any ring, and, if he looked less valiant in his later years, it was probably because exhausted nature could no longer inspire his struggles.

Fitzsimmons was as tall as most of the heavies, and really had much more hitting power. He had it all concentrated in the shoulders and back, and his skinny legs were good enough to carry him for a little while. Just for a little while—the big shoulders ended all discussions before the pipe-stem legs ever had a chance to grow fatigued. Bob not only HAD this hitting power, but—what was much more important—HE KNEW HOW TO USE IT.

And now—honestly, conscientiously—how many of the white hopes KNOW HOW?

WHAT WOULD FITZ HAVE DONE
TO THEM?

There you have it in a nutshell. Fitz knew how to hit, and these white hopes do not. Imagine him in battle with one of the 240-pound mammoths of to-day. Picture the Hope, thundering onward, pawing, groping, his huge hands flailing in the air, and finding nothing. Picture

the bobbing red head, ducking, dodging, the pipe-stem legs shuffling and shambling, the big shoulders wobbling in and out—and then shut your eyes. Let the ears do the rest. You hear a thud—then another thud—and that is all!

Once I saw Fitzsimmons battling a strong young man, a fighter who had won many contests, a fighter like the hopes of to-day, but, in my opinion, a fighter who could have trimmed the gang. He surged forward; he showered blows on the arms and back of Ruby Rob; being a real fighter and a gallant man, he landed some, nor did he shirk, or shrink, or hesitate. Suddenly Fitzsimmons, shuffling away from a powerful drive, shuffled in again, half-turned, and lifted one glove with an 18-inch jerk that was incredibly rapid. The ambitious fighter toppled forward and fell upon his chin.

I say that this fighter—and others who were roving the land in those days—could have beaten all the white hopes—but in the hands of Fitzsimmons he was a paper doll. What chance, then, would a single one of them have enjoyed?

John L. Sullivan would have sailed in, growling and glowering direfully, and before his dreadful charge the white hopes would have crumpled. Peter Jackson, like a great, black panther, would have fended them away a minute, fenced with the long snaky left a minute more, and then have crossed the right like the darting of a Zulu spear.

Charlie Mitchell would have fainted, taken the heavy but ill-aimed blows on the gloves or elbows, darted in, and dropped one swift hook to the belt-line. As for Fitzsimmons, the man with the one deadening short-range punch—oh, what fun, what merry doings! Such as these White Hopes were put on earth to gild the glory of such stars as he!

Honestly, is there one, one single, genuine, solitary Hope, now rampant and challenging, that you believe could have gone five honest rounds with Bob Fitzsimmons?

Fitzsimmons was, of all men, the one best adapted by nature and by fighting style to the upsetting of white hopes. He had the craft and wisdom with which

to elude their onsets, to anticipate their plans, to baffle all their brains of mud, and he had the terrific one-punch biff that could lay them low. Most men of Bob's actual poundage would have had their troubles in dropping some of the hopes, their immense bulk, possibly, giving them a chance to wear down the average middleweight. The other heavies would have cleaned up the hope brigade, but none of them could have done it quite so neatly and effectively as Fitzsimmons,

HOW JEFFRIES WOULD HAVE DONE IT

Jim Jeffries would have conquered the hopes several ways from the jack. He was fully as large as they are now—larger than a good many of them; he had a smashing punch superior to theirs; he knew how to use it, and he knew a lot about fight-craft, too. Fitzsimmons would have evaded, shuffled backward, wriggled in and discharged a single blow. Jeffries would have lumbered forward, heavy, yet terribly fast, like the attack of a grizzly bear; he would have pinned his man, beaten down his guard, and then sloughed him with two destructive blows instead of one. It would take Fitzsimmons, if in dead earnest, not in playful mood, about two-thirds of a round to get a hope; it might take Jeffries, with his different attack, a round and a half. The fate of the hope would have been the same in either case—in a fight with Fitzsimmons he would be hit by the instantaneous flash of a tiger's paw; in a fight with Jeffries he would be slammed by the concussion of two bear's paws.

John L. Sullivan, lighter than Jeffries, but with more of the ferocious fighting spirit, would have reveled in battles with the hopes. He had less accuracy of delivery than Fitzsimmons; less deadening sting to a single blow than either Fitz or Jeff; yet his attack was almost as terrible as the Jeffries onslaught, far more frightful than the soft-footed shuffle of Fitzsimmons. Assuming a dreadful look of mingled contempt and slaughterous purpose, John would charge at his men, using his fists more like clubs than hands, and beat down the victim's guard. Then would come three or four club-

like smashes across the face, and down would go the enemy in a heap. John was never a speed-marvel in pursuing a man. A lithe and active boxer could evade and get away from him—but the white hopes are about as lithe and agile as a hippopotamus and would have had to face the shattering music in a style that John simply would have loved.

Tom Sharkey, though much shorter than Sullivan, weighed about the same as John when the Big Fellow was at his best poundage. Tom charged in and slugged away much after Sullivan's style, but didn't have even as much skill or science as John L. He was indefatigable, relentless, dead game—a real fighter, not a boxer. Sharkey would have found the hopes tougher game than they would have been for Fitzsimmons, Jeffries, or Sullivan, but he would have beaten them just the same.

CORBETT TOO QUICK FOR "HOPES"

James J. Corbett hadn't any such wallops in his storehouse as these terrors always carried, but his superlative cleverness and speed made up for this defect. It would have been deliciously amusing to see a white hope trying to catch Jim Corbett, thundering round and round a ring, and whizzing his huge arms in frantic parabolas, while the Pompadour danced in and out and jabbed and stung. Jim mightn't have knocked them out, but he'd surely have made them look like something the cat dragged in.

Peter Jackson was not as lively on foot as Corbett nor did he rush to the attack with the frightening onset of Sullivan. Neither did black Peter have the one-punch swat of Fitzsimmons—and yet Peter was a great fighter. John L. would never give him, or any other black man, a chance, and to this day there are many who think Peter would have stabbed John's head off. Jackson has been forgotten by most of the modern fight fans—most of them, of course, never had a chance to see him. It may be said, therefore, that Peter Jackson was a heavyweight McFarland. Patterned in proportion to his bulk much like McFarland, Peter employed the same identical tactics—the long, snaky, educated left, flickering in and out like a

serpent's venomous head; the shooting, crossing, or countering right; the arm and wrist defence, coupled with an occasional clinch or a side-clip of the head - I saw Peter Jackson; I have seen McFarland; and their movements were as much alike as though they had been cast in the same machine. Like McFarland, Jackson hated to hurt anybody, and was a perfect gentleman until hard pressed—and then zowie, bing-bing, good-night! When I say that Peter Jackson was a heavyweight McFarland the modern glove fans can picture the black demon instantly.

Jackson would have toyed with the hopes more prettily, more artistically than any of the others. Corbett would have flashed rings around them, but would have made them look ridiculous in the process. Fitzsimmons would have played with them, but the show would have been so brief that it would not have given anyone a fair chance to understand its beauties. Jackson would have made them actually look as though they were good boxers, and as if they amounted to something. Like McFarland, he would have let them, in all probability, go the route, unless they attacked him too severely, in which case he would have knocked their onions off.

FROM KILRAIN TO CHOYNSKI

Jake Kilrain was the inferior of Sullivan in strength and of Corbett in science—hardly a really first-class man, but too good to be actually called a second-rater. Kilrain would have had a little trouble with hopes as big as Morris or Willard, but he'd have got them in perhaps fifteen rounds.

Charlie Mitchell and Dominick McCaffery were but little over the 158-pound mark, and were not tall and reachy boxers like Fitzsimmons. They were marvelously quick, superbly agile, dextrous in attack or evasion, and just about even up in quality, I doubt if they would have stood toe to toe and slugged with the hopes, or assaulted them as Jeffries and Sullivan would have done—in fact, their lack of poundage would have kept them from even making war the way Peter Jackson did. They would have vanished from the front of a rush as Corbett always did, but they

would have come in closer and fought with more venomous wrath than the Pompadour whenever an opening showed. In all probability, they would have beaten the hopes over a medium-long route, and would have stopped more of their men than Corbett or Jackson would have done.

Joe Goddard and Frank Slavin were magnificent animals of battle, and nothing more. They were fierce-faced, mustached, direful looking cusses, and wouldn't give a foot unless slugged off their feet. Big men, too—round 197 pounds. Pitted against the white hopes they would have known so much more about how to hit and where to hit, and would have carried so much more energy with their attack, that they'd have beaten the big shambling sheep down by sheer valor and actual force of arms.

Gus Ruhlin was a cross between the oldtime sluggers and the white aspirants of to-day. He was big, clumsy, lacking lots of things, yet in his knowledge of the game good enough to have upset the 1913 crowd. One man of all these hopes—Gunboat Smith—would have stood a fine chance to lick Ruhlin, his tactics and whizzing right clips for the head in the breakaway being just what Ruhlin couldn't dodge. The Smith wallops would have gone over Sharkey's head; he couldn't have got set for them with Sullivan; Fitzsimmons wouldn't wait till he could start one—but he might possibly have copped Gus Ruhlin.

Kid McCoy weighed only round 163 when heaviest, but his lightning speed and cruel, cutting blows would have dazed the hopes and left them in a whirl. Next to Fitzsimmons, I really think McCoy, at his best, would have knocked out the hopes most speedily. Not one of them could have caught him with a crabnet, if the Kid felt playful.

Jim Corbett, Jim Jeffreys, Tom Sharkey, and Bob Fitzsimmons have all given me their word that Joe Choynski hit them harder than any other man they ever tackled. Choynski could put simply annihilating force into a single blow, and could flash it in with startling speed. Wow, but how Joe could hit 'em! I KNOW. Believe me, I FELT ONE. Once, when I was young, I dreamed of the ring and its glories, and I donned the gloves, and I capered round a lot of

stevedores and hamfats, and then I was advanced to the glory of a bout with Joe Choynski.

He could hit.

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Joe's legs were not specially good; he was too light for the big men, and didn't have quite the foxy skill and wary tactics of Fitzsimmons; but he could drive them over like a bullet, and when he smote they reeled, they fell. He'd have raked the white hopes like a gatling gun.

Jack Root, Marvin Hart, and Mike Schreck, who flourished round 1906—yes, and stocky little Tommy Burns, from whom Jack Johnson won the laurels—all of these men would have been too much for the white hope brigade. They had good heads, knew how to

swat, where to swat, and when to let it fly, and Hart was plenty large enough for the present crew. But this is coming down too close—we were talking of the champs who flourished a few years earlier. Condense it this way: The present white hope brigade has only size. It has nothing else. No tactics, no wizard-like cleverness, no uncanny speed, and no K.O. punch ambushed in a single blow. Size alone would never have cut any ice against the warriors of the past. The veterans, trained in a hard school, long accustomed to hardships, jumping from the sheriffs, fighting almost to the death with little gloves, had it on these youths in too many ways. Too much class in every possible way.

