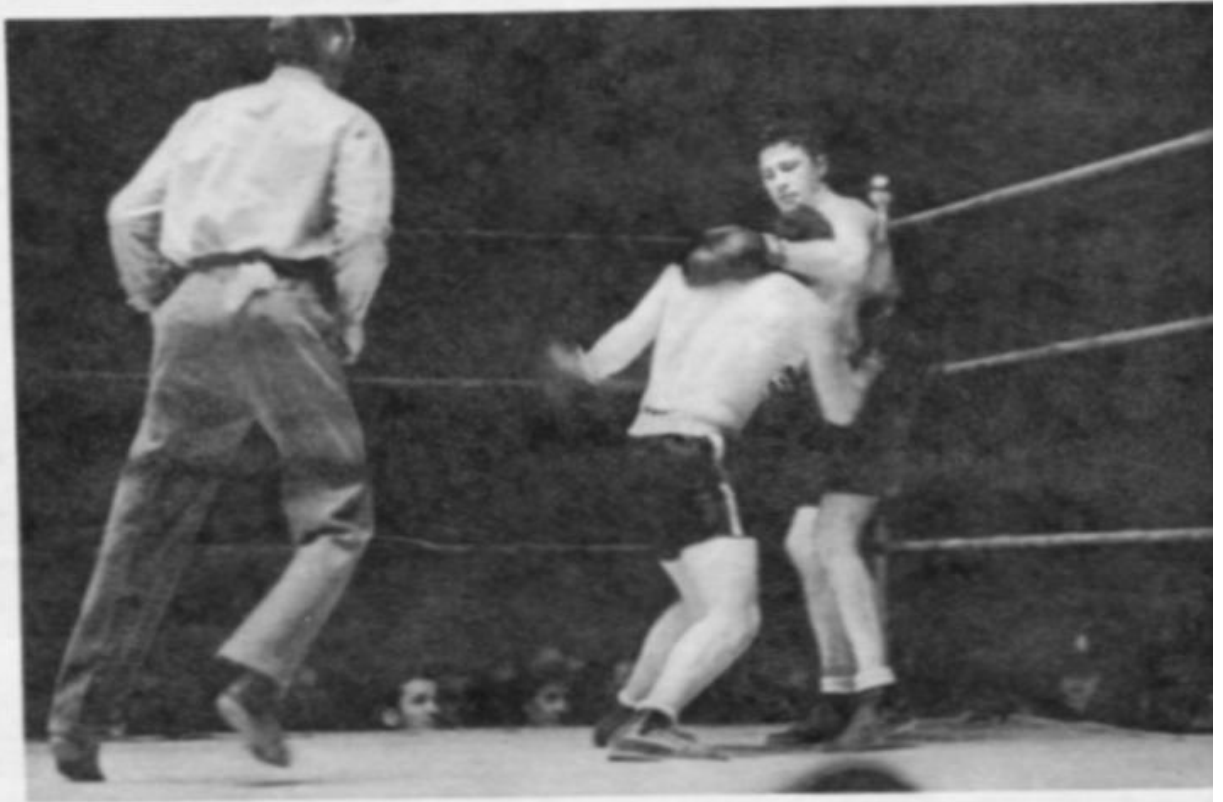


THE KING CLOWN



The King batters Tommy Loughran against the ropes in the Garden when the King scored a victory in upset.



Dempsey (left) and Levinsky drew one of the biggest gates at the Chicago Stadium in their four round exhibition.

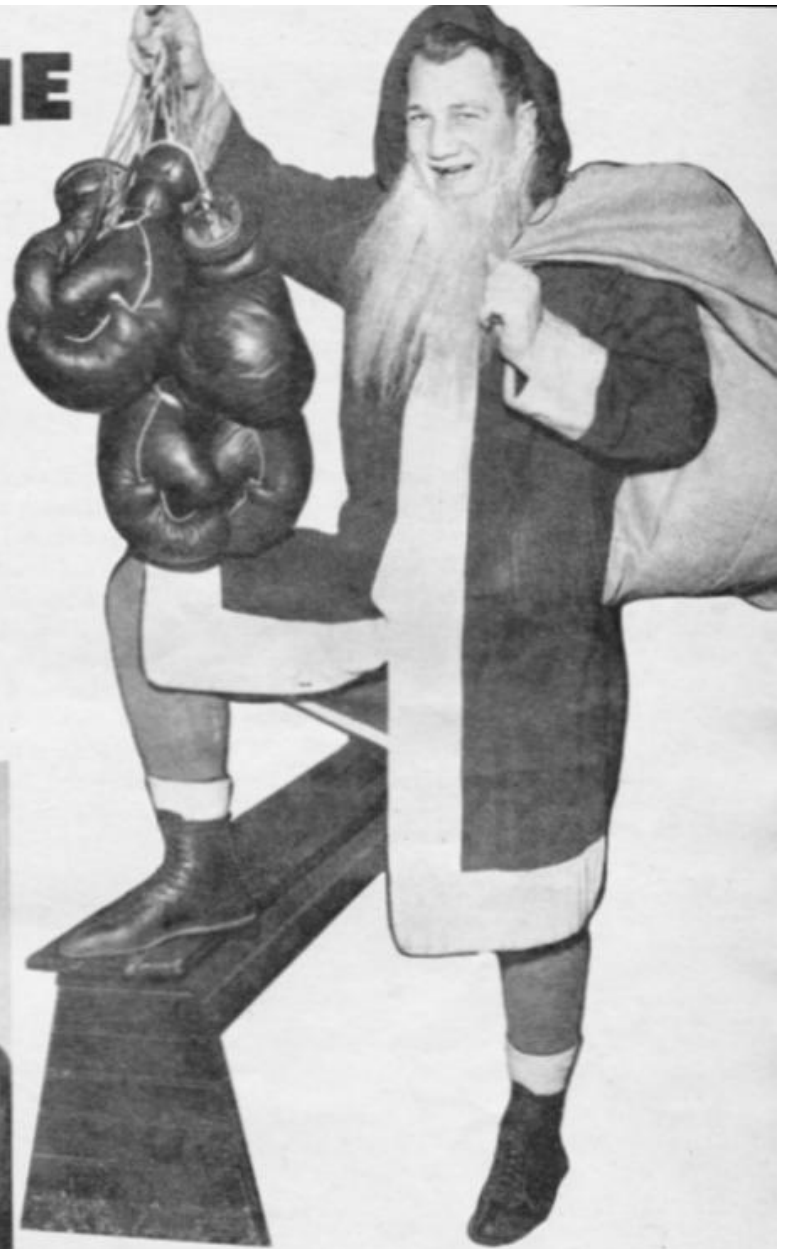
WAS A CUTIE

Kingfish Levinsky acted like a loon out of the ring, but it was mostly an act — and one that paid off. Once he donned the gloves he was one of the most feared fighters of his time

By **STANLEY WESTON**



When Levinsky whipped Jack Sharkey. Supervising the weights—George Getz, Joe Triner and Puckey McFarland



IN the depression racked 1930's, fighters had to be something special to separate fans from their hard earned dollars. They gladly paid to watch Canzoneri, Mc Larnin, Petrolle and of course the heavyweights Baer and Sharkey. Out around Chicago they tore down the gates to watch a swaggering heavyweight who was called Kingfish Levinsky. The name was hung on him because he once worked in the Maxwell Street fish stalls and not, as you might suspect, because he smelled like the product he once sold. Levinsky growled at folks who called him Kingfish. "Just call me King," he would say, "that's like calling me Champ."

Levinsky was, of course, a character. The kind of fighter reporters and publicity men loved because he made such hilariously good copy. Everything about the King oozed color—the way he murdered the English language, the

KING KLOWN WAS A KUTIE

way he stomped around the ring, the way he swished his right fist, his howling sister-manager, Leaping Lena Levinsky and above all his rollicking quotes— "Dat broad spitted in my eye."

To hear Levinsky, now 46, tell about his fabulous career makes you wonder why Hollywood bothered with the Rocky Graziano story when they had the gaudy Levinsky saga to work with. Said Levinsky: "I never lost a fight in my whole life except on a foul." The record however shows that the King did lose a fight now and then—to such stalwarts as Tommy Loughran, Jimmy Slattery, Johnny Risko, Tuffy Griffiths, Ace Hudkins, Max Baer, Maxie Rosenbloom and Joe Louis. He won 80 of 120 fights and scored 41 knockouts. Glance down the list of some of his victims and you wonder if Levinsky wasn't more than just a clown. He whipped Paulino Uzcudun, Jack Sharkey and reversed previous losses to Griffiths, Slattery and Tommy Loughran. In fact boxing master *(Continued on page 66)*



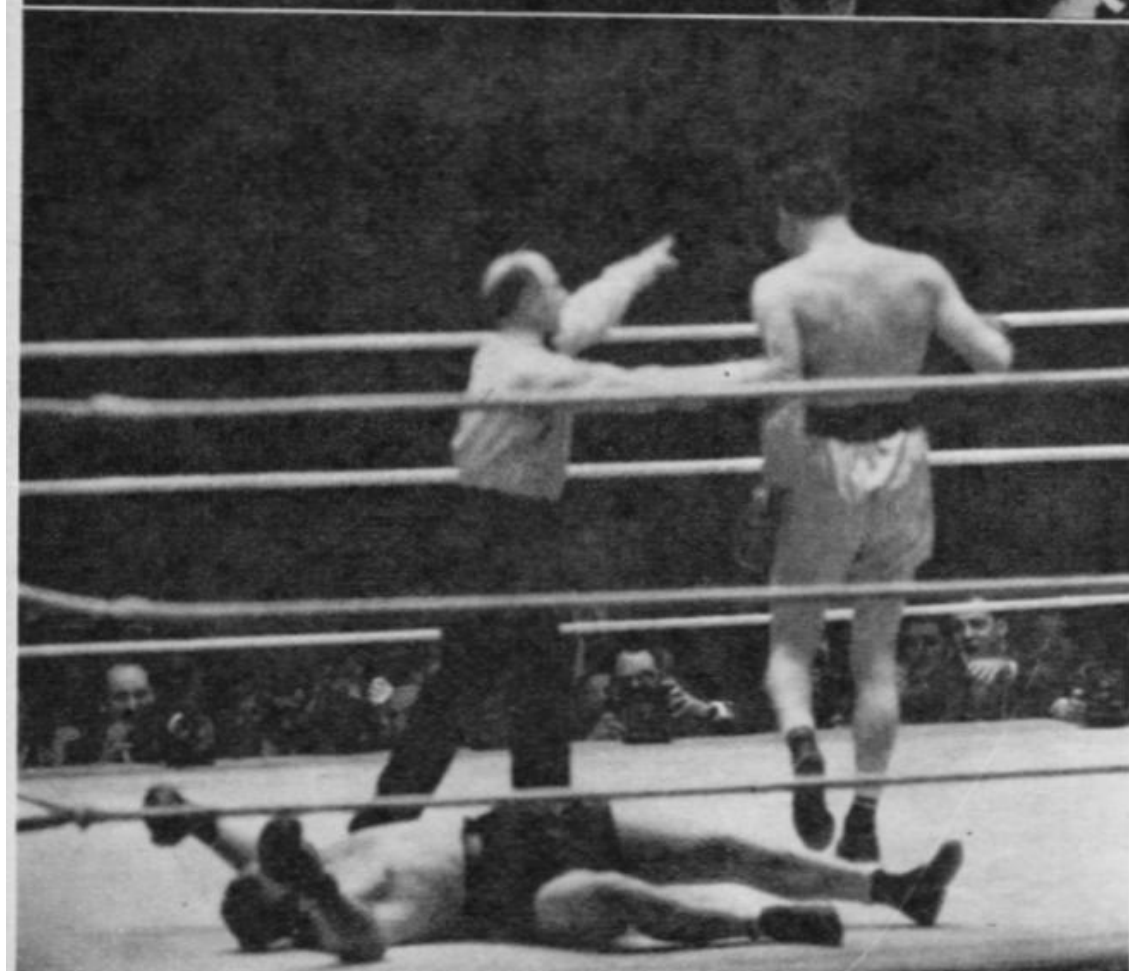
Devoid of his clownish tactics, Levinsky was a powerful hitter and had unusual possibility



The King was also known as a lover as can be properly attested when he was embracing wifey.



*Seated left to right—
Lena, Levinsky, Joe
Foley, Joe Louis,
Joe Triner. In rear
John Roxborough and
Julian Black, the
managers of Louis.*



*The King was dead to
the world after Max
Baer exploded one of
his potent rights on
his chin in the second
round at Chi Stadium.*

THE KING KLOWN WAS A KUTIE

Tommy on the deck three times in 1931, squelching Loughran's boast that nobody could tag him with an overhand ring. Levinsky dropped Tommy three times with that very punch. In 1932 it was Levinsky who stopped Jack Dempsey's comeback plans by winning a four round newspaper man's decision over the ancient Manassa Mauler. Said victor Levinsky in his dressing room "It's lucky for dat bum I wasn't around ten years ago, when he was champ. I'd have knocked him dead and won his title."

At the tail end of his career, in 1937, the King went to London for a fight with Irish mocking bird, Jack Doyle. Met at the boat by conservative British writers, the King eyed them slyly and asked: "Where is dis guy George who says he's da King. There's only one King in this here world and dat King is me — Levinsky da Foist."

Fat and out of condition, Levinsky went through the motions for ten rounds but Doyle got the nod. In fact, as one writer put it: "This is the first time in his life that Jack Doyle won a fight on his merits."

That opinion was based on Levinsky's remarks before the bout. He said: "I can't afford to lose this fight because if I do I'll be washed up in England, and I'll have to take that boat trip back to Chicago, and that'll kill me because I get so seasick I want to die. So watch me tear this bum to shreds."

Unfortunately, Levinsky was at a disadvantage. He said after the fight that he was out of practice in his speciality, hitting, because his sparring partners moved around so fast that he couldn't tag them. Furthermore, the King hadn't landed a solid blow on anyone in the last six months and he kept that record intact after 12-rounds with the Mocking bird. The King was loaded on a ship bound for the States, on which, as he feared, he damn near died of sea sickness.

Most everybody he came in contact with liked Levinsky and enjoyed hearing him talk. Even the other pugs hung around him at the gym and egged him into telling stories. It wasn't what he said that was so funny, it was the way he said it. Typical Levinsky story: "When I busted into this business Eddie Miller had me. The first fight he puts me in I'm going against a guy named Mickey Furay who is a real belter. When I walk out of the dressing room my dogs (feet) are burning like they are on fire. I go through the first round and I'm crying with pain and this mug is looking to belt my brains out. When I go back to the corner Miller yells, 'yer no good stalling bum! I paid \$250 for yer paper and yer die on me! So I tell him about my feet killin' me. He looks down at my dogs and sees the trouble real quick. 'Yer dope he yells, 'You got the wrong shoe on the wrong foot.' We do a quick switch and I knock Furay dead in the next round."

Although Levinsky had a number of dif-

ferent managers in his time, the real power behind his throne was sister Lena. Lena, or 'Leapin' Lena' as the mob called her, was a big, heavy-set woman, with black hair and pink cheeks. She had a natural gift for putting mugs in their place and when she plodded through the rickety gymnasium dressing rooms the mugs didn't bother to stop cussing because there was a lady around. Lena was always one of the boys.

Lena had protected and fought for the King when they were growing up together in the fish stall district of Chicago. For despite the tremendous power in his overgrown body, powerful enough to mop up a gang of kids twice his age, the King was a slow-thinking, easy-going boy, good natured and the butt of many a Maxwell Street prank. He tells of the times he stood in the smelly stalls, mocked, and humiliated, not knowing what to do. "And then Lena would bust in and cuss them guys and shake her fist in their faces and they'd run away."

And it was Lena who fought for and protected him when he grew into a towering man and the leading contender for the heavy-weight championship of the world. But Lena never babied him. She harried and berated him in public and even took a punch at him now and then. When Levinsky sulked and refused to train, the reason could always be traced to Lena. One day his trainer, Lizzy Klein, asked the King why he didn't go out on the road that morning. Levinsky looked at Klein with tears in his eyes. "Lena is mad at me," he said sadly.

In Lena's eyes, the King was the Champ—the greatest fighter in the world. No manager, male or female, ever cheered their boy louder or more sincerely than she. Just as Milton Berle's mother once stormed booking offices exploiting her little Miltie's genius, Lena brazenly made the rounds in behalf of the King. That was in the very beginning, when he was an unknown out of the amateurs where he had the worst record in Chicago Simon-pure history — 12 fights, 12 defeats. Where a man in her position he would have been thrown out bodily, Lena was politely shown the door. And later, when the King became the hottest box office attraction in the Mid-West and every promoter begged to use him, Lena drove bargains that even Al Weill would do well to study.

Unlike her brother, who never admitted losing a fight, Lena Levinsky did, reluctantly, concede that Max Bear and Joe Louis, really did belt out her heroic brother. But other than that, "my King was robbed every time a bout went against him."

There was the night in Madison Square Garden when Levinsky fought the jabbing German, Walter (The Clutch) Neusel. For the full ten rounds, Lena yelled instructions at the King: "In the belly, baby boy. Give him the thumb brother. You blind ref! Don't you see he's fouling the King?" When Neusel was given the decision, Lena broke into a

flaming tandrums. Leaping Lena leaped into the ring and spit in the referee's eye and was about to do the same to Neusel when three cops grabbed her and forced her off the platform. Then she headed up the aisle, cussing like a subway guard. Informed of Lena's unlady-like action, tough Commissioner Bill Brown ordered her to his chambers next day.

"Lena," Brown said coldly, "we can't have that sort of thing going on in this state. Remember, you are a part of boxing and as such you must conduct yourself in a dignified way."

Lena glared at the distinguished old gentleman. "No disrespect, Commissioner," she said blandly, "but those blind sons of B's you have as judges ought to be fitted for new glasses. Now tell me honestly — did that Dutchman beat my King?"

Brown, too mortified to speak, left the room without answering.

But there was one night when Lena saw her dear brother terrified with fright and she was at a loss to save him. This was the fight which Lena objected to but which the King insisted on. They argued about it for several weeks and then Lena reluctantly made the arrangements. She went to New York to see Mike Jacobs. "If my brother is to fight Joe Louis he's going to be paid real good for it," she told Mike. And Mike agreed. The most disastrous night in Levinsky's career was also his most profitable.

It remains a mystery to this day why Levinsky risked suicide by fighting Louis but he was so anxious for the chance that he laid some of the preliminary groundwork himself. After Joe's spectacular annihilation of huge Primo Carnera in 1935, the jubilant Mike Jacobs tossed a coming out party for Joe in a New York hotel. Purpose — to introduce New York writers to the young Killer and to perhaps give a hint of future plans.

Non-writer King Levinsky of Chicago, Illinois, was the first to show up in the banquet room. Those who recognized him smiled. "That Levinsky never misses a trick. A free feed and you'll always find the King." But Levinsky had come out for another reason beside filling his enlarged stomach with free Jacobs' grub. Starting his brazen pitch in a roundabout way, he approached one prominent reporter.

"You friendly with Mike," he asked?

"I am, but I don't know if Mike feels the same way. Why?"

"I wanted somebody to ask him a question," Levinsky said.

"Why don't you ask him yourself," the reporter wanted to know?

"I don't want to until somebody else breaks the ice."

"What's the question you want to ask?"

The King didn't bat an eye. "I want to fight Louis."

The King tried four or five other writers but they all refused to be a party to murder. A little confused, but as determined as ever, the King ripped the soiled napkin from his collar and followed the sound of Mike's clicking dentures. Quickly, Levinsky asked his question: "How's about you making me and Louis next?"

Jacobs stepped back for a quick look. Then he stepped in close for a whiff of the King's breath. Nothing except the usual halitosis — no sign of alcohol.

Mike was his old gracious self. "Can't you see I'm busy," he growled? Have Lena get in touch with me next week."

Lena signed for the fight two weeks later. It was to take place that August in the King's town, Chicago.

Levinsky trained at a rural retreat in Southern Illinois and went through his paces with typical nonchalance. He sparred without a headguard and ran around the place barefooted. When one of Mike Jacobs' stooges became appalled at the sight of Levinsky boxing without a headguard he took the fighter aside and asked: "how long have you been sparring with a bare head?"

"Watta' yer mean a bare head," the King asked dumbly. "I got hair."

"No, I mean no headguard," said the stooge.

"I don't need one," the King said bravely. "I'm real tough."

He was tough allright. All through the training grind he was tough and confident and brazen. He spit at a picture of Louis hanging from his locker door and he told reporters that Louis was a lucky bum who had been getting the breaks and that when he got Joe into the ring, he, the King, would give him a real break — in his neck. But on the night of the fight, something terrible happened to Levinsky. Recalled one of his trainers:

"He was fine walking into Comiskey Park but as soon as he walked into the dressing room, he snapped. He couldn't stand on his feet and he shook all over. I put my hand on his neck. It was cold and clammy. He felt like death."

A preliminary bout was in progress when the frantic word grapevined along the ring-side: "The King is croking in his dressing room." Jacobs was informed immediately and General Mike issued his combat order — "Get the main event in there quick!"

Two other scheduled preliminaries were passed over and Louis was rushed into the ring. Minutes passed. Where is the King?

Mike started for the dressing room but stopped as he spotted Levinsky, supported by jittery seconds on both sides, struggling toward the ring in faltering steps as though he were walking his last mile. Lena, who was picking up the rear, mumbled: "I told him this was a mistake."

The King looked pale and frightened when the bell rang. Meekly he rendered the automatic fighting pose and watched the killer stalking toward him. It was all over in less than two minutes. After being dropped three or four times, Levinsky sat on the lower strand of ropes, his hands covering his eyes, pleading with Louis not to hit him again. The crowd booed. Cigar butts flew into the ring and Jacobs growled to Hype Igoe: "That bastard had the nerve to ask for this fight."

Levinsky was born Harry Krakow, in New York's Bronx, September 10, 1910. His parents moved to Chicago when Harry was 14 months old and there he was raised — in the Ghetto, not far from where Barney Ross lived. He had a typical poor kid's youth; the street corner, running from cops and stealing apples from the pushcarts. When Harry Krakow turned to professional fighting he figured that with a name like Krakow he'd always be fighting more than the guy in the opposite corner. Recalling his rebirth as King Levinsky, the King said: "Eddie Miller was managing me at the start and before my first fight I told

him that a name like One Punch Hogan or Kayo Sullivan or Killer Burke sounded nice and restful and a hell of a lot better than just plain Harry Krakow.

Miller hit the roof. 'You are a Jew,' he yelled. 'Do you know what that means?' Yeah, I told him. I know what it means better than you do. But he told me that even a bad Jewish heavyweight could make a lot of money in the ring because there were so few of them around. He told me I'd be a dope if I hid behind an Irish name with a nose like mine. 'One peep at that hook of your's and they'll hate your guts for trying to be something that you weren't supposed to be,' Miller told me."

Levinsky picked his face out of a bowl of borscht and continued. "Miller's words made sense to me but I still didn't want to fight under my real name. It didn't sound like a fighter's handle. I remember a fighter named Battling Levinsky when I was a kid. He was world champion and he was a Jew. Levinsky sounded like a tough name to me — so I picked up where Battling Levinsky left off."

And the Kid didn't disgrace the respected name of Levinsky, not at the beginning, at least. He ran up a long string of knockouts and within two years was fighting main events in big Chicago clubs. He was taught to explode his powerful right over left leads and when he landed that blow the victim generally went sprawling to the deck, out cold. In 1930, still a 'greenhorn' in the trade, he stretched clever Leo Lomski in 5 rounds attracting nationwide attention. He followed by outpointing Jimmy Slattery, one of the finest boxers of all time and the smart guys in New York scratched their heads in amazement. "How did Slattery lose to a slow thinking, one-handed fighter like Levinsky?" The King provided an answer, "I hit him where it hoit da most. The King ain't no sucker yer know."

But the King did look like a sucker against solid Tuffy Griffiths in March, 1931. Griffiths chopped him to pieces with a stinging left jab and clobbered him with piercing rights. Only the King's animal strength prevented him from being knocked out. It was after the Griffiths fight that sister Lena voiced her opinion of the way her brother was being handled. Miller had sold the King's contract to Ray Alvis, a Chicago fight manager who dealt in mass production. Ray had a large stable going for him and the King did not receive the individual attention Lena thought he was entitled to. But Lena went along for a while, just watching and burning up inside. Alvis handed Levinsky \$4,000 for the Griffiths beating. The King gave the money to Lena who deposited it in their joint bank account. That night, Lena picked up the Chicago Tribune and read that Griffiths received a whopping \$25,000 for his end. Leaping Lena ran all the way to Alvis' office and demanded an explanation. "You're a manager," she said while shaking her meaty finger under Ray's nose? "You're a manager like I'm the Queen of Sheba."

Alvis explained that he signed for a flat \$6,500 guarantee and that the box-office take exceeded his wildest expectations. But he didn't convince Lena. Result: Out went Alvis and in went Lena as sole manager.

Lena was the brains behind a boxing career that grossed nearly a million dollars. But no one, not even Lena could glue the impatient Kingfish to his dough. He blew more money away than either Rosenbloom or Baer, two of the most exorbitant spenders in this exorbitant business. When he quit, after being flattened by one Frank Edgren in Memphis, in 1939, Levinsky had nothing left but six suits of clothes and 22-pairs of worn out shoes.

In the 17 years since his forced retirement, Levinsky drifted from one job to another. He tried wrestling in the 1940's but gave it up as a sport that "ain't for us gentlemen." The King remembers his last match vividly. "I got mad at this gorilla I'm rasslin' so I belts him on the chin and knocks him dead. The referee insults me so I belt him too. Then the cops come into the ring and take me away. Next day I'm banned in the State for life. So I quit, da hell wit em."

He earns his living today as a forceful necktie salesman, who turns up at every major sporting event and rams his merchandise down the customer's throat. It must be a successful technique because the King drives around in an expensive convertible and spends his winters near the race track in Miami Beach.

In June of 1954, the King was driving north from Miami to Atlantic City when a patrol car edged him over to the curb. Levinsky jumped out of his car. "I ain't done nuttin'," he said trying to look innocent.

"Are you King Levinsky," asked the policeman?

"That I am," answered the King proudly.

"We have an alarm out for you, Mr. Levinsky. You are to call this number in Chicago immediately."

The officer handed Levinsky a slip of paper with a phone number written on it.

The ex-fighter stopped at the next gas station and called Chicago. It was the phone number of a close friend.

"This is the King. What's up," Levinsky asked?

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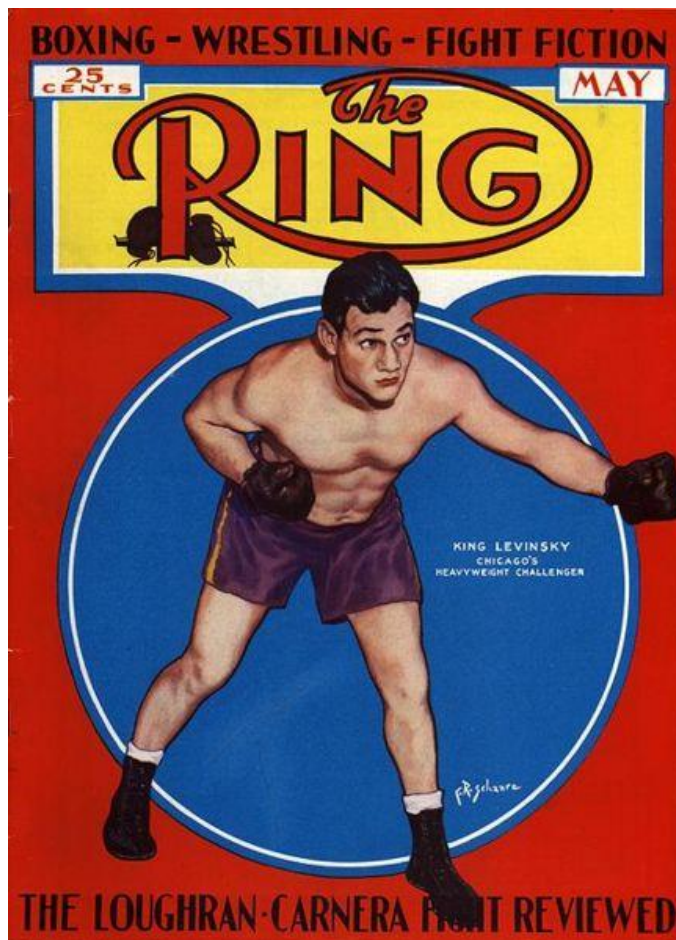
The voice at the other end was sobbing and hard to understand. "Listen, Harry." It had been twenty years since even his close friends called him Harry. The King was puzzled and now worried. "Whats the matter," he asked again?

"It's about Lena. She's dead," was the reply.

The King put down the receiver without speaking. His eyes swelled with tears. There were people watching but he didn't notice them. An elderly woman walked over to him. "Anything I can do, son," she asked?

Levinsky shook his head. "No thank you, lady," he said. "Nobody can do nuttin' now. The Queen is dead — and so is the King."

• • •



King Levinsky Photo Gallery.

1. Kingfish, Lena and Jack Dempsey
2. Ring Magazine, May 1935



Levinsky (right) looked confident enough at the weigh-in (198½ to Joe Louis' 197¼). But something happened to him that night during the taxicab ride to Comiskey Park.

THE KINGFISH AND THE BROWN BOMBER

King Levinsky was supremely confident that he would destroy the young, undefeated killer from Detroit—until he climbed into the ring

HIS CRAGGY FACE split with a crooked grin, Kingfish Levinsky swaggered along Chicago's redolent Maxwell Street, acknowledging the fish-peddlers' shouts of "Hiya, King!" with a sweeping wave of his ham-like fist. There was a heavy mugginess in the air that July morning in 1935, but Kingfish didn't mind. His tieless white shirt was open at the throat—Levinsky hated confinement—and he felt like a million dollars in his lustrous new gabardine suit. Happily, he jingled a pocketful of coins. There was going to be a lot more dough for him, he thought, when he fought that kid Joe Louis in August.

The Kingfish felt completely at home on Maxwell Street, in the fish stall district. And why not? He'd been raised there since the age of two when his folks—the Krakows—had moved from the Bronx, N. Y. And he had hawked fish there, his booming voice entreating passersby: "Get yer haddock here . . . fresh haddock. How 'bout a nice pound of haddock, lady? Or maybe you like some carp? Fresh. I caught 'em myself

only dis morning—right outta Lake Mich'gan. . . ." And his mouth—which had been compared with a hunk of melon—opened wide, revealing a gap in his upper front teeth . . . a memento of some long-forgotten street brawl. . . .

It had been nearly eight years since King Levinsky, now 24, had graduated from fish-peddling to prize-fighting. But he still loved to hang around the old neighborhood. The fish stalls had been Levinsky's life and it was only natural, when he turned pro and decided to get a "tough fightin' name," that he should select a monicker reflecting his background. It wasn't entirely his own idea, though. At first he toyed with such Irish names as "Knockout Hogan" and "Slugger Reilly." These awesome-sounding names were hardly justifiable in view of his disastrous amateur record. But there was an even more compelling argument against them.

"Are you crazy?" raved his manager, when Levinsky broached the subject. "Whaddya want an Irish name for? Look at it dis

way—you're a Jew, right? How many good Jewish heavies are there? Damned few. Right? So stick to a Jewish name. Think of the box-office!"

Levinsky — or, rather, Harry Krakow — grudgingly conceded. "Yeah," he said, slowly. "Guess you're right. Hey, how 'bout the name Battlin' Levinsky? He wuz a great fighter . . ." His face clouded. "Naw, I can't use the same name. It's gotta be a little diff'rent . . ." He thought a moment. Then: "I got it! Let's make it Kingfish Levinsky. How's that? Good, huh?" The "Kingfish" was a nod to the gravel-throated character on the Amos and Andy radio show that Harry listened to faithfully every night in those Depression years.

Levinsky puffed up whenever anybody called him Kingfish. After he made a name for himself as a wild, dangerous slugger, he liked it even better when people simply called him "King." It sounded so much like "Champ." That's what he was going to be, too, although a lot of dopes were already saying that that 21-year-old kid, Joe Louis, was the un-

crowned champ.

Everybody was talking about Louis and how he had destroyed Primo Carnera, the former champion, in six rounds the month before. It'd been his 19th K.O. in 23 straight wins. But who'd he fought? A bunch of bums. And not one of them had given Louis a workout—not even Carnera.

The Kingfish had gone to New York's Yankee Stadium to see that fight. The next day the papers were full of praise for Louis. They called him a lynx-eyed killer, the most murderous puncher since Dempsey, the fastest since Corbett, the best boxer since Johnson, Champion Jimmy Braddock, they said, wouldn't stand a chance against the "Brown Bomber."

But the Kingfish had been un-

impressed. He looked on with fish-eyed scorn as Louis butchered 260-pound Primo. Said Levinsky: "All I know is that Louis ain't been hit yet. Wait till I clip him with my right."

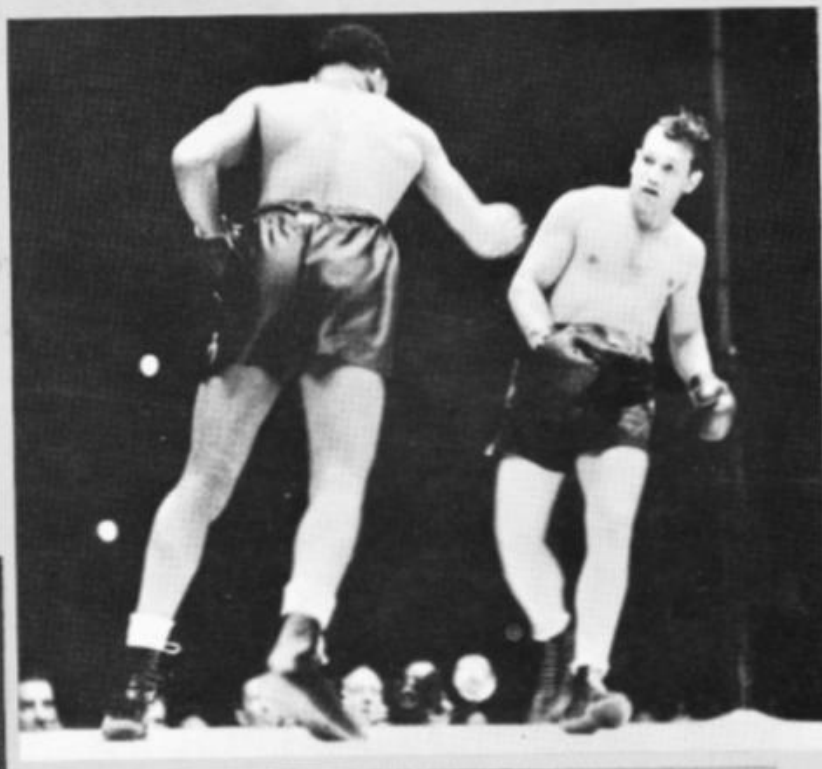
At that point, a Louis-Levinsky bout was farther away than the moon. There was talk of matching Joe with ex-champions

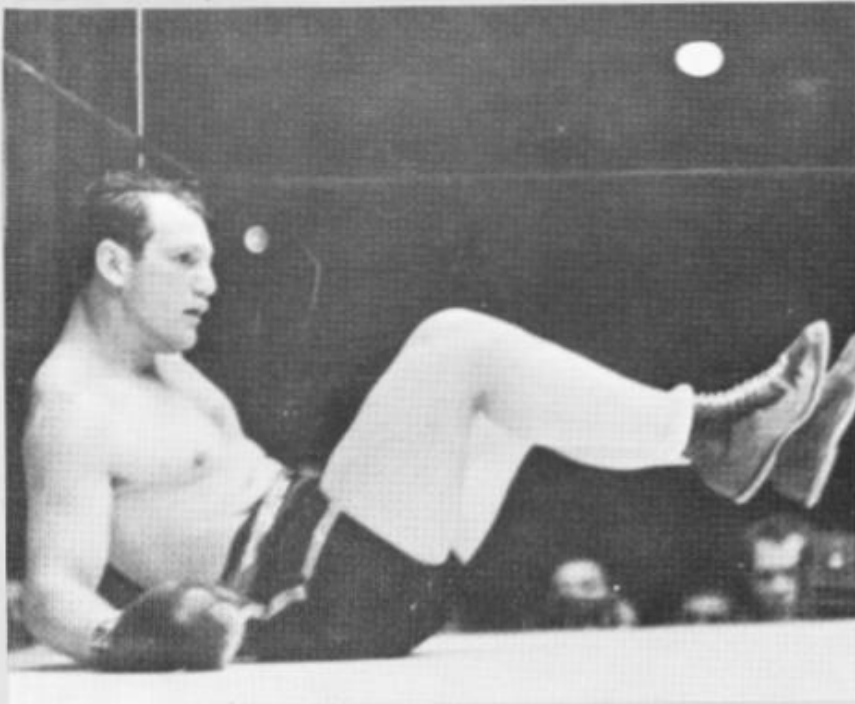
Max Schmeling and Max Baer before giving him a crack at Braddock's title. Levinsky didn't fit into the picture anywhere . . .

But the Kingfish made it his business to get into the picture. When Mike Jacobs tossed a victory party for Louis after the Carnera fight, Kingfish was the first to show up. "Look at Levin-

When Louis came out winging, the bewildered Kingfish forgot everything his trainer had told him—and started back-pedaling crabwise.

Joe went right after him and, blazing away with both fists, decked Levinsky with a left hook to the chin. Kingfish got up at "2."





Backing up frantically, Levinsky missed with a wild right and Louis knocked him down again—this time for a five-count.

sky packing away the grub," smiled one sportswriter after the banquet hall had filled up. "That Kingfish never misses a free feed."

On this occasion, though, Levinsky had more than food on his mind. This was apparent when he buttonholed several newsmen and asked them to approach Jacobs about a Louis-Levinsky bout. The newsmen thought he was crazy and turned him down. "Ask him yourself," said one. So Kingfish did.

Jacobs was thunderstruck. It was as if he had asked Mike to arrange for his funeral. But, always the gracious host, Jacobs growled: "Cantcha see I'm busy? Tell Lena to call me next week."

Mrs. Lena Levy—or "Leapin' Lena," as the sportswriters called her—was Levinsky's sister: a heavy-set woman with black hair and pink cheeks . . . and a vocabulary that would have shamed a longshoreman. Although Kingfish had a number of managers in his time, Lena was the real power behind the throne.

Lena got the match. She usually got what she wanted—especially where the Kingfish was concerned. Lena had fought savagely for her brother ever since they'd been knee-high, protecting the easy-going, good-natured guy from pranksters and taunting bullies and, later, bursting into fight managers' offices to get fights for him.

To Leapin' Lena, Kingfish was the greatest fighter in the world. It was inconceivable that he could ever lose. When he did, it still didn't change her opinion. "We wuz robbed!" she would scream, repeating Joe Jacobs' famous crack in arenas all over the country.

After she browbeat Mike Jacobs into accepting a Louis-Levinsky match, she shrieked: "The King is ready . . . he's in shape! He



The dazed Kingfish slumps onto bottom rope after struggling up from fourth knockdown. Referee stepped in just as Joe was getting set to finish him off.

ain't gonna make any mistakes this time like he did when he fought Max Baer and got belted out while he wuz wavin' to me that everything was O.K."

But secretly, Lena was worried. She knew Jacobs was no dummy. He hadn't agreed out of the goodness of his heart. After all, what did Louis have to gain from such a fight? His victory over Carnera had pointed the way to a return of the million-dollar gate. There were bigger fish to fry than Kingfish . . .

Jacobs was certain that Louis would have no trouble with Levinsky. Besides, he figured, a bout in Chicago's Comiskey Park would draw a large Negro crowd.

Lena tried to argue the King out of fighting Louis. But he insisted. And so, reluctantly, she trooped into Jacobs' office to make her pitch. She gave it all the theatrics for which she was famous—jumping up and down as she screamed Levinsky's praises and throwing snappy left hooks and right crosses to drive home her points.

But when her performance was over and she had won, Lena felt a tremendous letdown. She had always laid down the law to her brother and he had obeyed. When, on occasion, he got stubborn, she would fly into a rage and berate him unmercifully—even in public. Levinsky would sulk for a while, but eventually he'd come around.

Sometimes, Lena took a punch at him to change his mind. This time it was different. This time she didn't bother. She felt a heavy ache in her heart. When news of the match hit the papers, everybody moaned that the Kingfish had put his head on the chopping block. Not even Lena could save him now . . .

Levinsky, though, had no reservations about his chances. "Whaddya talkin' about?" he'd tell skeptics, poking stubby fingers into their ribs. "Didn' I beat Jimmy Slattery? And Leo Lomski, Tommy Loughran, Jack Sharkey, Primo Carnera and all dem odder good fighters? And didn' I wreck Jack Dempsey's comeback?"

It was true—though the King-

fish conveniently omitted the fact that Slattery and Carnera had also beaten him—and so had Loughran, twice. Nor did he bother to mention those three defeats by Max Baer. But these were minor details to a man who was anxiously eyeing the glittering heavyweight crown.

There were some who sided with Kingfish—even those buddies who, out of sheer perversity, liked to see him get his lumps. "All he needs is ta land dat old haymaker," said one supporter. "Then you'll see if Louis can take it!"

The newsmen, who had already hung up the crepe, had to agree. Said one: "Not since the second Dempsey-Tunney fight in 1927 has there been such excitement about a fight here in Chicago. The general opinion is that Louis will win, but anything can happen when Levinsky fights. When he figures to win, he sometimes loses, and when he looks like a cinch to get licked, he comes up with a victory. You can't underestimate him. What he lacks in class he makes up for with his punch and courage. Until Baer bowled him over, Levinsky had never been on the deck before, and he fought all of them from Dempsey down."

Whatever the reason, most experts agreed that the element of surprise presented by the Louis match, the remote possibility that Levinsky might come up with the most stunning upset of the year, had fired the imagination of fight fans who, in the words of one boxing writer, "were treating the bout as if it were a championship event."

One reason, of course, was the element of uncertainty. The other was the Kingfish's colorful personality. While training for the Louis bout at a suburban retreat, his friend Barney Ross visited the camp and was aghast to find Levinsky sparring without a headguard.

Barney took Kingfish aside and asked him how long he'd been sparring with a bare head. "Whaddya mean, bare head?" the Kingfish said dumbly. "I got hair."

When Barney patiently ex-

plained, Levinsky growled: "What do I need headgear fer? I'm tough!"

Nevertheless, to please Ross, he donned a headgear. A few minutes later, Barney saw him punching the heavy bag. There was no need for the headguard now—but the Kingfish was still wearing it. "Why?" Ross asked him. Levinsky grinned crookedly: "I th'ot you meant I should keep it on all the time."

Despite his nonchalant attitude, Levinsky trained for Joe Louis as he had never trained before. Barney Ross' trainers, Art Winch and Izzy Klein, were hired to get him in shape and they appeared satisfied with his progress. They were also satisfied that the Kingfish had no fear of Louis.

Levinsky looked confident enough at the weighin (198½ to Louis' 197¾). But during the taxicab ride to Comiskey Park that night, something came over him.

"He started to die," Art Winch recalled later. "His face was white. He was sweating. When he got to the dressing room, he began undressing like he's preparing for his own funeral. He has a funny, blank look in his eyes."

"Then Jack Blackburn, Louis' trainer, came in to supervise the bandaging of the King's hands. When Levinsky saw Blackburn, and realized how close that made Louis, he got even paler. Blackburn didn't mean to sound threatening but the first thing he says is: 'Chappie upstairs been waitin' a long time fo' you.' That really did it. The King froze like he's paralyzed."

A preliminary bout was in progress when word flashed to ring-side that the King was "croaking" in his dressing room. Mike Jacobs went gray when he got the news. "Get that main event in there quick," he barked. When the prelim was over, two other bouts were shoved aside and Louis was rushed into the ring.

He looked cool, calm—and deadly; his face, as usual, expressionless. But as the minutes ticked by and Levinsky failed to show up, Joe began to shuffle back and forth. And the 39,000 fans, who had paid \$192,000, grew rest-

less with him.

Levinsky was still in his dressing room. "Finally," said Winch. "I started him down the aisle. We had to keep crowdin' around him because we figgered he might turn around and go back. I tried to pep him up. 'Just remember, King,' I told him. 'Don't back up.' 'Yeah, sure,' he says, but I know he's not listenin'."

Kingfish faltered as he was hustled down the aisle. Behind him and his handlers was Leapin' Lena. She was almost as gray-faced as her brother. Levinsky nearly stumbled getting into the ring. As the referee intoned the instructions, Kingfish had a far-away look in his eyes.

Then the bell rang and he saw Louis trotting out toward him. Automatically, he brought his gloves up—and began backing up crabwise. Winch gasped. This was exactly what he'd told him *not* to do. But his advice was smothered in a blinding flurry of fists as Louis floored the King with a left hook to the chin.

Louis trotted to his corner, apparently figuring it was all over. But he didn't change expression when the referee waved him back as Levinsky wobbled to his feet at the count of 2.

With the roar of the crowd in his ears, the Kingfish peered dazedly at the oncoming killer. That left hook had convinced him that everything they'd said about Louis was true. And now, he backed-pedaled frantically, trying to escape. But there was no escape.

In desperation, he threw a wild right at Joe's jaw. Louis ignored it and kept shuffling in methodically. Then—boom! boom! boom! Down went the King, for a count of 5. When he struggled up, he took one stab at Louis before fleeing again. It was a looping over-hand right that glanced off Joe's shoulder.

Louis kept moving in. It was only a question of time now. The Kingfish had withstood two deadly assaults. He had proved he could take it. He had proved his courage. You couldn't help but admire a guy like that, even if he was trying to run away. Who wouldn't run away from certain disaster?

Loosing another barrage, Louis climaxed it with a left hook that blasted Levinsky to the canvas for the third time. And again he got up! He struggled to one knee, whispered something to referee Norman McGarrity, then staggered erect at "5."

Kingfish peered at Joe's blurry figure, and the fans shrieked for blood, but Levinsky could hardly hear them. He was trying to stumble out of harm's way, trying to keep those murderous gloves from crashing into his face . . .

. . . It was no use. Backed into a neutral corner, panic in his eyes, the Kingfish feebly put up his arms to ward off the attack, but Joe knocked him sagging into the ropes with cruel hooks. Levinsky took a count of 4 . . . rose . . . fell back and slumped on the bottom rope, arms resting wearily on his knees, as if he was thinking something over.

As he squatted there, a pathetic figure etched in defeat, Louis shuffled in again. Suddenly, Levinsky looked up pleadingly at referee McGarrity and muttered something. Some say he begged: "Don' let 'im hit me again . . . I'm through." Kingfish later denied it: "I mumbled somethin' but I can't remember what it wuz . . . I wuz hurt and groggy but I'm positive I didn' tell the referee dat . . ."

Anyway, McGarrity waved Louis away and, grabbing Levinsky by the arm, led him to his corner, where his handlers plopped him onto his stool. The Kingfish just sat there, bent over, mumbling incoherently, ignoring the cigar butts, crumpled cigarette packages and other bits of debris hurled into the ring by hooting fans.

It had taken Louis just two minutes and 21 seconds to destroy the fish-peddler, but to Levinsky it was an eternity.

Later, as reporters quizzed him in his dressing room, the Kingfish went through the ordeal of reliving those 141 seconds of hell. "Louis," he summed up prophetically, "hits harder den any guy I ever fought. He'll kill Max Baer if they meet."

Somebody asked him if he was

going to continue fighting. "I'll answer that," briskly interjected trainer Izzy Klein. "This isn't gonna keep the King down. He'd like to meet Louis again . . ." Maybe Leapin' Lena, standing outside the dressing room, heard him. Maybe not. But there was no mistaking the tears in her eyes.

There was a time for tears and there was a time for happiness. The tears never lasted long with the bouncy, effervescent Krakows. A week after the fight, they were bustin' out all over with joy and glowing predictions.

A reporter threading his way through discarded fish crates in Maxwell Street found them parked in a brand new Kelly-green automobile. Kingfish was behind the wheel. Lena, her hair now flaming red with fingernails to match, sat in the back.

"Hey, you louse," Levinsky hollered to the reporter. "You're just the guy I been lookin' fer. I want you to put in the papers that the Kingfish ain't through yet."

"You mean you're actually going to continue?"

"Sure, why not? The next time I'll use my knob. I didn' use my knob when I fought Louis. There's the rub, palsy-walsy. If I'da used my knob I wouldn' be where I wuz at. I wuz dumb . . . I mean dumb . . . I should out-t'ink dem bums. My noodle should work so fast dey ain't able to wham me. See what I mean? Get it?"

"That's right, you tell 'im!" shrieked Lena. "That bum hit you enough on the knob. It's in the belly where you should take 'em. You can say for the Krakows that Fisheye ain't through. He's coming back. And he'll fight with his brains—with his brains, I'm telling you. And any bum that says different, I'll wrap a crowbar around his neck."

It was a touching tribute to sisterly love and the reporter was duly impressed.

"Well, King," he said, "what are you going to do until your next fight?"

Levinsky scratched his head for a moment. Then he brightened and, with a grand wave of his arm, said: "I t'ink I'll go into exclusion . . ." ■