John L. Sullivan Was Callow Youth When He Hurled First Defi at Ryan for Championship

BY BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee and Manager

Early in December, 1880, there appeared in the daily press an advertisement from a "modest and unassuming" man, which read:

"I am prepared to fight any man breathing for any sum from $1,000 to $10,000 at catchweights. This challenge is especially directed at Paddy Ryan and will remain open for a month if he should not see fit to accept it." The ad was signed, "respectfully yours, John L. Sullivan."

Ryan had ascended to the heavyweight championship just six months before by beating Joe Goss in 87 grueling rounds. Sullivan had boxed half a dozen men and two short exhibitions with Mike Donovan and Goss, his first bout being with Cocky Woods in 1878. But so far as the big time was concerned his reputation was nil. Ryan ignored the defy.

Shortly after, Sullivan, in Buffalo, accepted an open challenge flung by Professor John Donaldson to meet anyone for a purse, but the professor took one look at Sullivan and declined the issue.

Goaded by criticism, Donaldson agreed to meet Sullivan on Dec. 24, 1880, in Cincinnati. Sullivan stiffened him in 10 rounds. The following May 16 Sullivan knocked out John Flood in eight heats in their famous battle on the barge anchored off Yonkers, and after a few more victories, met Ryan on Feb. 7, 1882, in front of Barnes hotel, Mississippi City, for $5,000 and championship of the world under London prize ring rules.

After Sullivan knocked out Paddy in eight rounds, Ryan said: "Sullivan has arms like sawed-off telegraph poles. He hits like a piledriver."

Following this fight, Sullivan ranged the land battering all comers, became the rage of the pugilistic world. He traveled to England, where he met, and boxed for, the prince of Wales, toured Ireland and in France fought his historic 39-round draw with Charley Mitchell at Chantilly, May 10, '89.

Back in America, July 8, '89, he kayoed Jake Kilrain at Richburg, Miss., in 75 rounds, toured the country with the show, "Honest Hearts and Willing Hands," and wound up a glorious but tempestuous career by losing to James J. Corbett in 21 rounds at New Orleans, Sept. 7, 1892.

John Lawrence Sullivan, 5-10½, 190 in his prime, was born Oct. 15, 1858, in Boston, of Irish stock. His father came from Tralee, County Kerry; his mother from Athlone.

John L. Sullivan

He was destined for the priesthood, studied at Boston college, but at 17 he weighed 180 pounds and already had a reputation as the "Boston strong boy." John L. left school, became a plumber's helper at $4 a week, then apprentice to tinsmith, next a baseball player and finally a mason.

At 19, as he put it, Sullivan "just drifted into boxing." Here he met many fair weather friends, among them old John Barleycorn, and with them led a roistering, swashbuckling life. The pace took its toll, as John L. discovered when he faced young Corbett.

For all his roughness when in his cups, Sullivan disliked the brutality of bare-knuckle fighting under London prize ring rules and inveighed against them. He condemned them as "too dirty."

"Fighting under Marquis of Queensberry rules before gentlemen is a pleasure," he said. "To the other element it becomes a brawl."

In his later years Sullivan lectured in favor of prohibition. Before his death in February, 1918, he had become a teetotaler.

John L. was one who knocked out old John Barleycorn.

Young Corbett Was Cockiest, Disdained McGovern's Title; Glory Enough to Beat Terry

BY BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee and Manager

Young Corbett was the cockiest fighter ever to win a title and the most contemptuous of it.

It was Nov. 28, 1901, when young William H. Rothwell, alias Young Corbett, came out of the middlewest to flatten the hitherto invincible Terry McGovern in two bloodtingling rounds at Hartford, Conn. This was a stunning upset, for McGovern ruled favorite at 1 to 5, and one of the few to bet against him was this same upstart, Corbett.

It's ring history now how the kid from Denver, on his way to the ring, pounded boldly on Terry's dressing room door and bawled: "Hurry up, Terry, come out and get your licking!"

Up to that time, McGovern's opponents shriveled and shrank when they faced his ferocious aspect in the ring.

The defeat left McGovern raving mad. The boys had fought at 126 pounds ringside, instead of the till then conventional 122 featherweight limit, and Terry snarled at Corbett:

"You ain't the champion, anyway; you didn't make the weight."

"That's O. K. with me, Terry," replied his conqueror. "You keep the title. I'm satisfied just to be known as the guy who kayoed Terry McGovern."

Corbett repeated his K. O. over McGovern in 11 rounds, March 21, 1903, in San Francisco. Young Corbett couldn't stand prosperity, however, and defeats by heavier men, Jimmy Britt and Bat Nelson, gambling, put him almost down and out.

William H. Rothwell, 5-2¼, 126 at his fighting best, was born Oct. 4, 1880, in Denver, Colo. Game to the last inch, whatever he did he did with all his might. When fighting, he fought the best; opening wine, he did it with both hands; stepping the primrose path, he burned a trail, and gambling, the sky was his limit.

The late Jack Doyle, "Sage of Broadway," told of the time he met Young Corbett in a gambling house in Saratoga. The kid was broke, asked Jack to stake him to half a buck. Doyle offered more, but Corbett declined, saying he just wanted a drink.

An hour later, strolling past a roulette wheel, Doyle saw Corbett, surrounded by an admiring crowd, playing the wheel, with a stack of chips before him.

"How much you got there?" asked Doyle.

"'Bout $6000," replied Corbett.

"Better cash in and git," advised Doyle. Corbett laughed.

Couple of hours later, Doyle, finishing a goodnight cigar on the hotel veranda, heard someone coming down the street whistling cheerily. It was Young Corbett.

"How'd you make out?" called Doyle.

"Oh," replied Corbett with a careless laugh, "I lost the half a buck."

He died broke April 10, 1927, in Denver.

Young Corbett was no piker.

Young Corbett

Choir Boy Licked Tough Kids; Willie Lewis Originated One-Two; Taught Carpentier to Box

BY BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee

Willie Lewis was a cherub-faced choir boy who could lick all the tough kids in the toughest neighborhood in New York—the old Gas House District. A fine soprano voice fooled many a bully into a shellacking, won young Lewis a local reputation and a modicum of money in the theatrical world when the noted Maggie Cline of "T'row 'im Down, McCluskey" fame, engaged him to sing in her vaudeville skits.

At 14, Willie's vocal chords changed for the worse and his fighting for the better, so he began boxing as a featherweight when hardly out of short pants. Before he was through, Lewis became a fighter of international renown, tackled lightweights, welters, middleweights and finally heavyweights with marked success, although at his peak he never scaled more than 158. He stood only five feet eight.

Lewis, always a gentleman and a dude fighter of his period, originated the one-two punch, taught Georges Carpenter to box. Carpentier copied Lewis 'style, threw his explosive right hand precisely as did Willie. Finally, the pupil proved superior to the master when they boxed 20 rounds in Paris, May 22, 1 912, a hairline decision going to the youngster who was to become the Orchid Man.

Lewis wasn't particular about opponents, took them on as they came. He tackled Sam Langford as a welter when all others were ducking Tham, was knocked out in the second stanza, but not until he had dropped the Boston Tar Baby for a count of nine in the first with his famous one-two. Few heavyweights knocked down

Willie Lewis . . . choir to clout

Langford, and those who did had to wait until he got old and they caught up with him.

Two years following the Langford match, Lewis took a six-round newspaper decision from the illustrious Joe Gans in New York.

Handsome, dapper and debonair, the blond, blue-eyed Lewis was a spontaneous hit when he arrived in Paris in 1908. He beat Jeff Thorne, knocked out a half dozen of Europe's best in succession, finally flattened three in one night to become a national idol.

Lewis commuted between New York and Paris. Six times he visited the French capital, stays lasting from one engagement to more than a year. Lewis and his manager, Dan McKetrick, contributed much to the devolopment of boxing in France.

When the Seine overran its banks and created vast havoc, Lewis and McKetrick joined rescue parties, donated generously toward relief. They were decorated, hailed nationally.

During Lewis' second sojourn in Paris stories of his tremendous success lured Honey Mellody, former welter champion, into making the trip in an effort to steal some of Willie's thunder. Mellody had knocked out Lewis in four rounds. This time it was Lewis' turn, and Honey went out in four.

Lewis engaged every headliner with whom he could get on—Rufe Turner, Willie Fitzgerald, Kid Griffo, Martin Canole, Harry Lewis, Billy Papke, Stanley Ketchel, Dixie Kid, Frank Klaus, George (K. O.) Brown, Jeff Smith and Mike Gibbons, to name a dozen not previously mentioned.

Ketchel and Lewis became fast friends after the immortal Steve broke Willie's jaw, knocking him out in the second round in New York, May 27, 1910. He was shocked when Ketchel was shot and killed the following October, still talks at length on his favorite fighter and subject.

Lewis retired in 1915, now presides at a bar opposite Madison Square garden, where he regales customers with interesting fight tales.

And Willie Lewis is as accomplished a story teller as he was a fighter.

Brown Didn't Look Like Great Fighter, But You Never Could Tell Just Where He Was Looking

BY BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee

Towheaded, cross-eyed Valentine Braun was the most naive and yet dangerous little battler I ever saw. Shooting from an unorthodox southpaw stance, as Knockout Brown he pasted out many an accomplished boxer, bewildered and outhustled two world champions—Ad Wolgast and Abe Attell—accumulated a comfortable fortune and retired practically unscathed after six fulsome years of campaigning among the best lightweights.

Valentine Braun, 5-3¼, 133 in best fighting trim, was born April 27, 1891, of German-American parents in New York's seething east side, cradle of many a great fistic star. Because of his grotesquely crossed eyes which made it impossible to tell which way he was looking, other kids, with traditional thoughtlessness, haxed young Braun. He was constantly fighting his annoyers.

Practice made perfect and when Valentine took to professional boxing at 17 he scored 30 knockouts in rapid succesaion and became known as Knockout Brown.

Knockout was the most deceptive looking pugilist the ring ever knew. With his shock of straw-colored hair, his lively grin and boyish countenance he looked like anything but a fighter.

Brown met Ad Wolgast, the lightweight leader, in a six-rounder in Philadelphia, Feb. 8, 1911. Ad looked into Kayo's eyes, became so baffled that in the fourth round, when Brown staggered him with a terrific left swing, he fell into a clinch and snarled:

"Why don't you hit where you are looking?"

Harlem Tommy Murphy at the ringside challenged the winner. So Brown met Murphy in Harlem,

Knockout Brown was the most deceptive looking fighter the ring ever knew.

May 25, 1911. This was their second clash, the first having ended in a draw. This time Knockout looked at the southeast corner of the ring and knocked the Irishman into the northwest in 40 seconds.

"I thought he was looking the other way," remarked Harlem Tommy when he came to.

Although he was never noted for cleverness Brown surprised the talent and Abe Attell by completely outpointing the featherweight champion in 10 hectic rounds at the National Sporting club, New York, Jan. 18, 1912. After the fight, in which Abe seemed unable to evade Brown's paralyzing left. Attell offered a unique alibi.

"The kid just had me non-plussed, that's all," he said.

Among other topnotchers who felt the sting of Knockout's left were Fighting Dick Hyland, Matt Wells, One Round Hogan, Matty Baldwin and Leach Cross.

Leach was the first ever to put Kayo on the deck, in old Madison Square Garden, June 3, 1912. Twice Cross dropped Knockout, but each time Brown rose before a count could be started and at the finish was giving as good as he received.

Brown was a rousing little fighter until he went to southern California in 1913. There all the sauerkraut and pigs' knuckles he had accumulated ganged up on him and he blew up like a grapefruit, took on weight rapidly and lost speed just as fast.

Taking a fling in the 20-round game, he was knocked out by Joe Rivers in 10 rounds. He held Bud Anderson even in 20 and then was stopped by the Vancouver, Wash., belter in 15 rounds. Returning to New York, he was stiffened by Leach Cross in six.

Brown retired early in 1914, is now a well-to-do real estate owner in Arlington, N. J.

Knockout Brown didn't look like a fighter but you never could tell where he was looking.

Villa Popularized the Filipino Fighter and He Died With His Boots On as Great Champion

BY BILLIE ROCHE
Famous Referee

Pancho Villa packed as much personality into his little brown body as Jack Dempsey. The boy who popularized the Filipino fighter was a little Manassa Man Mauler, a vicious, rip-snorting, hooker who went 15 rounds at blinding speed and finished apparently as fresh as when he started.

A scant inch more than five feet, weighing 109 pounds at his best, with swarthy skin and coal black hair sleeked straight back after the fashion of a Hollywood sheik, Pancho the Puncho looked more like a doll than a fighter. But he was built like a little Sandow, endowed with amazing strength and stamina.

Villa was the second fighter in modern history to die at his zenith while holding a world championship, the other being the ill-fated middleweight Stanley Ketchel. Both enjoyed the good things of life, lived while they were on earth.

After winning the world flyweight crown by knocking out Jimmy Wilde in the seventh round at the Polo Grounds, June 18, 1923, Villa took on heavier opponents, among them Kid Williams, Bud Taylor thrice, Jabez White and other topnotchers, winding up with Jimmy McLarnin in Oakland, Calif., July 4, 1925.

Villa never should have been permitted to go through with that bout. Just prior to the encounter he had a troublesome wisdom tooth extracted. Complications developed and Pancho entered the ring a very sick lad. For 10 gruelling rounds he waded into the heavier McLarnin.

Pancho Villa . . . too game.

The decision went to McLarnin. Villa left the ring and returned to the dentist's chair. More teeth were extracted and Pancho was told to return next day for further treatment. Instead he threw a wild party which lasted several days. The wounded jaw was forgotten, neglected. Blood poisoning set in.

Pancho, ordered to a hospital, refused to go. The condition became acute and he was rushed to the operating table on which he died, July 25, 1925.

Pancho Villa was born Aug. 1, 1901, at Iloilo, Philippine Islands. At 18 he took the ring moniker Pancho Villa, waded through all opposition in his native land, winning the flyweight and bantamweight championships of the Orient.

In 1922 Villa came to America and on Sept. 14 astounded fans by knocking out Johnny Buff in 11 rounds for the flyweight championship of America, losing it later to Frankie Genaro, who outpointed but couldn't outfight him.

In seven years Villa fought 100 battles, won 70, 22 by knockouts, boxed 21 no-decision bouts, four draws and lost five times.

If Pancho Villa had a fault it was that he was too game for his own good.

Cross First to Draw Crowds By Making Addicts Dislike Him; Sneak Puncher Great Actor

By BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee and Manager

Leach Cross made personal unpopularity pay handsome dividends. He was the first boxer to draw great crowds by making them dislike him.

Cross looked more like a casualty than a prizefighter. Pale, skinny and emaciated looking, he fooled spectator and opponent alike into thinking a stiff breeze would blow him down and out.

At first the fans resented being crossed by Cross, who disappointed everybody but himself by winning. They clamored for his defeat. Every time he fought the place was jammed with vengeful citizens who attended only in hope of seeing him get his block knocked off, and went away frustrated and angry when he emerged the winner.

It didn't take the fans long to realize, however, that Cross always gave them a run for their money, and that for or against him, he provided thrills either way.

Cross spent a couple of weeks training in the Catskills for an important fight. A wealthy cloak and suiter happened to be stopping at the same hotel. Upon hearing that Cross was a prizefighter, the merchant guffawed.

"Him a fighter?" he cried, "why, my neighbor in the city has a boy who would kill him with a punch."

"What's his name?" asked Cross, whose real name was Louis Wallach.

"He's Hyman Wallach's boy, and is he a fighter!"

The clothier nearly fainted when told Cross was that boy, wouldn't believe it until he saw Leachie score a K. O. He became an ardent rooter, brought business associates in such big groups that they were known as Cross' buttonhole-makers' brigade.

Cross became the fistic inspiration of New York's lower east side.

Leach Cross, 5-7½, 135, was born February 12, 1886, in Ridge Street, in the heart of New York's teeming tenement district. Unlike most lads who entered the ring from the neighborhood he was neither a bully nor leader of a street gang. He learned to fight protecting himself from attack by gangs on the way to and from City College, where he received his education in academics and dentistry.

Cross began fighting at clubs near his home in order to gather a little extra money. He knocked out Bob Waters in his first fight in 1906 and fought nearly 200 fights between then and 1921, meeting the best, champions and near champions.

His toughest fight was with Fighting Dick Hyland, who stopped him in 41 rounds at Colma, Calif. That cured him of 45 rounds.

Cross was a great actor in the ring and this enabled him to land many a sneak punch.

Leach returned to dentistry, went to Hollywood, built a magnificent apartment house, went broke in the stock market crash.

Leach Cross is back near his old neighborhood in New York successfully practicing dentistry.

He was a fighting dentist who never pulled his punches.

Leach Cross is a dentist who never pulled his punches.

Ritchie Got Big Chance as Sub, And Won Championship on Foul, But He Was a Capable Stayer

BY BILLY ROCHE
Famous Referee

Willie Ritchie was the second lightweight champion in history to win the title on a foul, yet he was one of boxing's gamest and the most persevering fighter I ever saw.

I was in swaddling clothes when Arthur Chambers won from Billy Edwards at Squirrel Island, Canada, on a foul in 26 rounds, Sept. 4, 1872.

Forty years later Ritchie took the crown from Ad Wolgast when the Cadillac Wildcat hit him low in the 16th round at Daly City, Calif., Nov. 28, 1912. Willie was winning hands down, had Wolgast wobbling on the verge of a K. O. when the foul occurred.

Geary Steffen, 5-feet 6¼, 135, was born Feb. 13, 1891, in San Francisco of American parents. He took the fighting name of Willie Ritchie, began in four-round bouts at 16 in local gyms, in which he showed dogged tenacity.

Every time a lightweight battle was staged, Ritchie climbed into the ring and challenged the winner. This became a standing joke with the crowd which booed and jeered him.

Opportunity knocked when Ad Wolgast, stricken on the eve of battle with appendicitis, was unable to fight Freddie Welsh for Tom McCarey in Los Angeles, Nov. 11, 1913. Knowing Ritchie always to be in shape, Packey McFarland, for whom he was a sparring partner, suggested he be substituted. Ritchie went on and though he lost the decision, stayed the limit, 20 rounds, gave Welsh a whale of a battle.

Three months later Willie repeated his substituting act from the audience in Philadelphia, taking Packey McFarland's place against Young Erne, holding the Quakertown lad even in a six-round no-decision contest.

This paved the way for Willie's crack at Wolgast's crown the following Thanksgiving Day.

Armed with the title, Ritchie began to make it pay dividends. In his first defense he took on the toughest contender in sight, Mexican Joe Rivers, who exactly a year previous had lost on a mooted kayo to Wolgast in 13 bloody rounds when each scored a knockdown and Referee Jack Welsh lifted Ad and counted out Rivers. Ritchie flattened the Mexican in 11 heats, July 4, 1913.

Willie Ritchie was a persevering fighter.

After beating Leach Cross, Tommy Murphy and Charley White, Ritchie again met Welsh. He made the mistake, however, of fighting in London and although Willie was aggressor throughout, Welsh's light-hitting, fancy Dan tactics earned him the decision, British version—with it, of course, the championship.

Welsh refused to give Ritchie a return shot at the crown and when we entered World War I, Willie became boxing instructor at Camp Lewis, Wash. He returned to box Benny Leonard eight rounds in Newark, April 28, 1919, fought savagely, but was so badly battered a second threw in the towel 20 seconds before the final bell.

Willie Ritchie retired. Some years ago he was appointed boxing inspector in California. He recently charged politics and phenagling had corrupted boxing in his home state, demanded an investigation.