TRICKS OF THE RING DISCLOSED BY NEGRO

Bobby Dobbs, Trainer to Bobby Barrett and Alex Hart, Tells of Smartness of Joe Gans and Joe Wolcott, Old Masters of the Gloves

By STONEY McLINN

TOM GIBBONS, who seeks to wear the world's heavyweight crown, has cast-iron fists. Once they were tissue-paper. There's a reason for the toughening of the St. Paul fighter's bread winners.

Three years ago Gibbons sprained a thumb training for an important bout. He was bemoaning his fate in the hearing of Tom McGinty, Cleveland promoter.

McGinty, a wise bird, suggested that Gibbons engage in gripping exercises to develop his hand muscles. And Tommy began to carry a rubber ball with him at all times.

Walking through the streets, riding on public carriers or sitting in a comfortable chair at home, Gibby holds the ball first in the right hand and then in the left. He massages it gently.

Tommy's muscles have developed and his hands toughened to the point where he insists he would have no fear of the wearing qualities of the fists in a finish battle.

This fact was mentioned to Bobby Dobbs, the former colored light and welterweight and the trainer who has brought forward for James Francis Dougherty two lightweights who are now very much in the boxing spotlight—Bobby Barrett, who has come back by winning his last two fights, and Alex Hart, who gets a real test when he boxes Benny Leonard eight rounds in the headline bout of the Gunnis-Taylor show at the Phillies' Park on Monday evening, July 9.

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Believes in Hand Exercises

"YES, sah, ther's a lot to dat hand-hardenin'," was Dobbs' comment. And Bobby, sixty-five years old, who has landed many thousands of hard punches, exhibited a pair of hands that would come pretty near to felling an ox this day.

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BOBBY DOBBS' hands are puffed out; it would appear that they were swollen from constant pounding against the heads and bodies of opponents. But the old colored athlete says the swelling is not from socking others.

"Dat's muscle," he declared. He insisted that all fighters who amount to anything exercise their hands continually to develop muscles, and in this way strengthen and harden them to the point where they seem to be swollen as from bruises.

Dobbs, once started, told of other tricks that fighters learn to prepare themselves for participation in strenuous battles.

While we were talking with Dobbs, Alex Hart was doing some shadow boxing in the open-air ring on the lawn behind the Ridley Park mansion of the Baron of Leiperville. Dancing around, jabbing, upper-cutting and socking an imaginary foe, Alex frequently used the thumb of his right glove to peck at his own nose.

"Thumb Brush" a Trick

The gesture is one that gives the appearance of brushing away a pesky fly or relieving that itching sensation. It has become rather common among boxers.

But it is a trick—and one which Dobbs believes was introduced into the ring by that great trio of colored boxers, Gans, Wolcott and Bobby himself.

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IT IS a trick, too, that catches the average slow-thinking boxer off his guard nine times out of ten.

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A GLOVE fighter who sees his opponent brush his nose with his thumb thinks an opening is presented for a rush and a solid wallop on an unprotected jaw. But the said opponent, who is fooling with his nose, is setting a trap for that very rush.

When the rush comes, the fist that is brushing the nose becomes very active, and sometimes the rushing fighter finds his own swing cleverly blocked and meets a glove on the point of the jaw that fattens him for the count.

Colored Trio Very Tricky

Dobbs declares that many of the tricks employed in the ring were developed by the great colored trio, Gans, Wolcott and Bobby himself.

"The white fighters had an idea that we culled fellahs was slow thinkers," mused Bobby. "We let 'em think anything they had a mind to think.

"But, occasionally, we got together and exchanged ideas. And we thought out tricks to fool 'em. They was easier to fool, too, because they thought we was dumbheads.

"Yes, sah, I could tell a lotta things white boxers who wondered how they came to be licked by one of the culled champions things that would open their eyes—how we worked out ring tactics in our meetings."

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Dobbs Believes in Prayer

BOBBY DOBBS, by the way, proudly announces that he is a Christian and tells how prayer possibly saved his life and got him home from Germany at the beginning of the World War.

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DOBBS was boxing instructor in a university in Germany. For five or six days, he relates, he had noticed unusual excitement and hurrying to and fro. But his German vocabulary did not contain the word for "war," which he was hearing so frequently.

At last Dobbs became actually frightened about the thing. He was sure some big uprising was under way and he yearned for his native country.

That night he repaired to his room and, he says, got on his knees and prayed. He asked that God in some way reveal to him the meaning of the word that was on all lips.

His prayers ended, Bobby lay on the bed in the darkness with his eyes wide open and fixed on the ceiling. "I believed that in some way the Lord would write, so my eyes could see it, the meaning of that word," he said.

But the word was not revealed to him—that night. In the morning he was walking from his bedroom to an adjoining bathroom when, he insists, he felt his knees trembling.

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His Prayer Answered

THEN and there Bobby knelt and asked the Lord to in some way reveal to him the meaning of the word that would solve the riddle for him—let him know what was going to happen.

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AFTER his morning breakfast, Dobbs says, he felt inclined to take a walk and endeavor to ascertain what was going on. He was not far away from his rooming house when he was accosted in this wise:

"Well, what part of America do you come from?"

Bobby had not heard the English language spoken for months and was too amazed to answer.

"Come on, now, don't tell me you don't speak English," continued the stranger, a white American.

Then Bobby found his voice and told the man from the United States that he was born and raised under the protection of the Stars and Stripes. And very soon he learned that the World War was just beginning—had the meaning of the mysterious word and the answer to his prayer.

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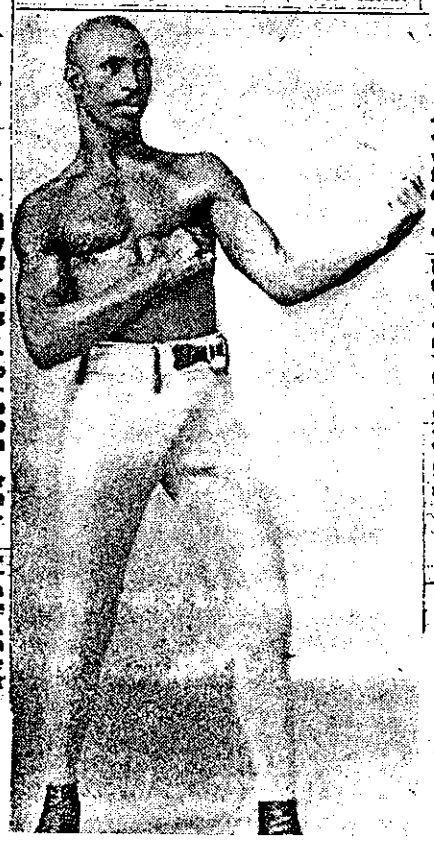
"MY MONEY, all foreign, didn't t worth anything, but I traveled home first class and had three good meals every day," was Dobbs' final testimony to the efficacy of prayer.



Bobby Dobbs as he looked when in his prime

THIS MIGHT BE DOBBS' LAST INTERVIEW.
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