

# FIGHTER CONFESSES



*"Young Griffo at 160 pounds could have taken the measure of Jeffries."*

*"Fitzsimmons was an overrated cur" was the frank estimate of Joe Choynski.*

*"I never saw a better fighter" was the esteem in which Joe held Peter Jackson.*

**Joe Choynski, who fought the immortals, gives startling inside information about the famous fighters of his generation.**

*(A few weeks before he died in 1943, Joe Choynski who knocked out "unbeatable" Jack Johnson, held Bob Fitzsimmons, Jim Jeffries and Tom Sharkey to draws granted an exclusive interview which is printed here for the first time.)*

**C**INCINNATI, Ohio, January 10, 1943.—The old man sat on a faded green couch facing the window; Naked from the waist up so that the inpouring sun bathed his chalky skin. He was tall, white headed and lean, surrounded by an air of sublime dignity. His classic Barrymore profile and the long cut of his hair suggested a passe Shakespearean ham. Every so often he would raise slowly to his feet and pace *(Continued on page 68)*



## A Great Fighter Confesses

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restlessly around the room; obviously straining against the inevitable pitfalls of old age — revolting against the realization that in only twenty-five years hence his score would be a full one-hundred. But this was no relic of the theatre, this was Joseph Choynski, first and last of the great Jewish heavyweights who wasn't really a heavyweight at all but who on the basis of cold statistics cannot be categorized any other way. I listened to him relive his fights with Corbett, Jeffries, McCoy and Johnson; Fascinated by his vivid, sometimes biased, accounts; intrigued by his reasoning and convictions.

Choynski lives here in Cincinnati. He has a vague connection with one of the local athletic clubs although no one is quite sure exactly what it is. He also has a hacking cough and his fingers are tortured by crippling arthritis but his mind is sharp and his words have the bite of a tough teenager. Like all old-timers he belittles and resents modern day pugs — the exception being Joe Louis. His compliment to the Brown Bomber? "If he were around fifty years ago, I'd have let him carried my water bucket." Choynski was more generous to Jack Dempsey — "He is the only heavyweight since Johnson who is worth his salt."

But the modern fighters are not alone in feeling Choynski's harassing. To him Bob Fitzsimmons was a cur. That was the descriptive word he used and he wasn't smiling when he said it.

"Yes my writer friend," he said, "Fitzsimmons was a cur."

I asked him to explain.

"It's something that needs no explanation," he growled.

Naturally I was curious as to what bitter memory of the past made Joe sour on the freckled wizard. I knew that he had boxed Fitz and later toured thousands of miles with him on exhibition jaunts and that Fitz cut him in for fifty percent of his purses. Why this animosity? I pressed for an explanation!

It would be of help to me Mr. Choynski if you could give me some hint why you condemn Fitzsimmons. He raised his square chin. His eyes blazed as they must have years before when he was one of the most feared fighters in the world.

"That is what I don't like about you reporters," he snapped. "I made a point and told you that it needs no explanation but still you insist I give reasons."

I tried to apologize but he refused to let me.

"Fitzsimmons wasn't the kind of person you could trust. He'd tell you one thing to your face and then stick a knife in your back. It happened to me many times. He did the same thing to Kid McCoy and Tommy Ryan. Of course I don't like to say these things publicly because, after all, Bob is dead and can't talk back. I know that if our positions were reversed, with me buried under six feet of dirt and Fitzsimmons here by this window relishing the warm sun, I would expect him to hold his tongue about me. But those are personal things." Choynski picked an old book from the table. "Let us look at Bob's record. Let us look through the thin line of type in Tom Andrews' record book. Take for example his fight with Gus Rublin. The book shows that Rublin was stopped in the 15th round. But it doesn't say what condition Fitzsimmons was in at the time. I'll tell you. I was there and I know. He was bathed in his own blood. His eyes were swollen into slits and his nose was smashed. Rublin was stalking him, getting ready to knock him out when Fitz let go a desperation punch which, luckily for him, landed squarely.

"In his match with Sharkey," continued Choynski, "Fitz was saved by the bell in the first round because his manager had a deal with the timekeeper who pulled the handle some thirty seconds before he should have. And Jim Corbett had him on the floor at Carson City and was winning in a cake-walk when Fitz tagged him with the solar-plexus punch. And . . . And . . . And."

Choynski stuttered for a moment. All he could say was "and."

"And what sir," I asked anxiously?

"And what about my fight with Fitzsimmons?" he finally sputtered. "The record book shows that we boxed a five round draw in Boston. The date? I think it was June of '91. I hit him with a short, inside right to the mouth and he dropped like he was dead. I walked back to my corner, knowing that he wasn't going to get up. The round wasn't a full minute old when all of a sudden the bell rang. I spun around and to my amazement, saw Martin Julian, Bob's manager, picking Fitz up. Police swarmed into the ring and their chief waved his arms over his head. That was the signal that the bout had been stopped. To this day I still wonder if the fight would have been stopped if it were I, not Fitzsimmons, laying on the floor."

Choynski had been up on his feet throwing imaginary blows as he described his skirmish with Ruby Robert. Now he was seated again, breathing hard from the strenuous motions. There was a glass of wine on the table. He picked it up and wet his lips.

I asked him about the time he knocked out Jack Johnson in three rounds at Galveston, Texas. How did a little fellow like you ever manage to knock out the greatest heavyweight champion of all time?

The old man grinned. "So even you know how good a fighter he was. That shows you're on your toes young man," Choynski said curtly. "But about the time I knocked him out — I must be honest about that. Jack was only a kid at the time and he made a mistake leading into me. I watched him do that for a couple of minutes and then I pulled back, quickly like this," Choynski was on his feet once again taking his fighting stance, left hand far out in front, right hand cocked away back like a sling shot.

"I cracked him just over the temple with a right smash. That was the exact target I had in mind from the second the fight started. He dropped like a stunned ox."

I told Joe that I had seen pictures of him and Johnson in a Galveston jail; in the same cell. How did that come about, I asked?

He took another sip of wine and explained the incident.

"Texas Rangers were stationed all around the ring. We were warned in advance that if we violated the Texas anti-prizefight law we would be arrested. To get around it the bout was billed as an exhibition — like a vaudeville act. If I hadn't knocked out Johnson there would have been no arrests. I should have had more sense than to hit him so hard but when I saw the opening, I just couldn't resist the temptation. Jack and I spent 30-days in jail, talking to reporters and posing for photographers. The food was terrible; wormy bread and moldy beans. We were dog sick most of the time."

When I asked Joe who was the best man he ever faced he threw his arms into the air. "I knew that was coming," he said bluntly. "It never fails. Everybody wants to know who was the best. That is a very tough one to answer and frankly, I don't like to be pinned down. But if I were forced to give an opinion I'd have to say Corbett. You asked me who was the best man I ever fought not who was the best I ever saw. Had that been the question I'd say the black giant from Australia, Peter Jackson. Although I never met him in a real bout I did spar against him in numerous exhibitions. You people today think Joe Louis is a great fighter. Know what this man Jackson would have done to Louis? He'd have chewed him up and then spit him out." Choynski snapped his fingers. "Like that he would have done it, and without breaking a sweat."

What made Jackson so great?

"Oh, everything. The way he boxed and punched and picked off blows in the air. In my opinion he was the perfect prize fighter. I respected Jeffries as a great war-horse but Jackson was vastly superior to Jeff in every department save brute strength. There is no question that he would have slaughtered Jeffries and knocked him out somewhere

over a 25-round distance. "

I asked Choynski who was the best fighter pound for pound — that is regardless of weight. Again the old man's face lit up as he dug back through the years.

"Another Australian," he said. "A dopey kid who fought under the name of Young Griffo. That wasn't his real name. He was a tiny shaver. A featherweight with a funny build. A terrible drunk. I saw him chop up George Dixon, Joe Gans and Kid Lavigne and I still don't believe what my eyes saw. They talk about 'once in a lifetime' miracles. This Griffo was remarkable. It is my opinion that the world will never again see a boxer who approaches Griffo's genius. If he were heavier, say about 160-pounds, he could easily have held the heavyweight championship of the world. I realize that may sound like a ridiculous statement considering that 225-pound Jim Jeffries held the title at that time. But Griffo was great enough to offset Jeff's 65-pound weight advantage and stab him to pieces."

Choynski looked at the big, ancient railroad watch which hung from the mantle. "I see that I've been talking for over an hour," he said. "That's the time limit I set for interviews nowadays." He started to walk toward the door and I followed. Just as I was about to set outside, he put his massive hand gently on my shoulder and said:

"I am flattered that you visited me young man. Flattered to know that people still want to read about the old timers. I realize that your head has been filled with a great many confusing stories about Sullivan, Jeffries, Corbett and all the rest of us. Sports writers have a way of drifting away from the facts just to make a good story. If you are suspicious of what you have heard I honestly can't blame you. But this one point I want to make clear. For all those weird stories there was a solid factual basis. They were a master race of fighting men. I'm proud I was one of their generation." ● ● ●

## He Does Everything Wrong

(Continued from page 25)

to be another easy fight for Bob that would further enhance his position among the leading heavyweight contenders.

But what the Satterfield brain-trust forgot, was the fact that Holman had been pleading with his manager Bernard Glickman, wealthy Chicago Awning manufacturer to get Satterfield for him. Glickman played coy when he was asked to accept Satterfield.

"Why he'll ruin us," said Glickman. "After all, he knocked out my boy twice, and what's going to prevent him from doing it again?" After much debate Glickman finally signed for the bout. He called Johnny into his office, sat him down in one of the comfortable leather chairs, and pointed out to Holman how important this bout was. Holman had just knocked out Boardwalk Billy Smith, Ezzard Charles, and Cesar Brion. Holman listened without saying a word, and when Glickman finished Johnny stood up, walked over to Glickman's desk, and said: "Boss, I'm going to knock this so-and-so out, I've been waiting to get even for a long time." With that he shook hands, and

returned to his job in the factory, which is located in the rear of Glickman's plush office.

And so, on January 11th, of this year, Holman climbed through the ropes in the Chicago Stadium, a 2-to-1 underdog to face the heavy artillery of Bob Satterfield. When it was all over, the box score showed that Holman took Bob's best punches, dropping Satterfield three times, and in the eighth round the referee decided that Bob had enough, and wisely stopped the fight. When Holman returned to his corner, he turned to Glickman with a big smile on his face, and said "Well, I told you that I'd take care of this guy."

It was the Satterfield fight that jumped Holman from a number 9 rating among the leading heavyweights in the world, to his present position of number 4. He took another bout right away, meeting Joe Rowan in Miami Beach, and winning in ten rounds. Johnny, after being just a plodder, seemed to find himself, and was now anxious to take on the leading contenders for the heavyweight crown.

Johnny was born in Lake Village, Ark., August 3, 1927. He moved to Chicago with his Mother and sisters in 1945. Always a tall and husky man, Johnny was persuaded by a few friends to give boxing a try. Johnny admits today, that he didn't particularly care for boxing, and will grin a little sheepishly and tell you that he was a shy boy, and through boxing thought that he could overcome that complex. An amateur boxing Club on Chicago's West Side, gave Johnny his first taste of the ring. In 27 amateur fights, Johnny won 24, and began to take a deep interest in fighting.

While still in the amateur ranks, Wade Harris who was training Johnny, thought that Johnny was ready to invade the professional ranks, and recommended as a manager C. J. DeBoldt, and Chain manufacturer in Chicago. Big John won his first 6 professional fights, five by knockout, and then lost two of the next four.

After a four month absence from the ring, Holman lost to Omelio Agromonte in Chicago, and dropped a close one to Clarence Henry in Los Angeles. Soon after that he began going down in class, fighting four-rounders against unknowns.

After a year of idleness, Johnny happened to be in the Midwest Gym one afternoon, talking to Gene Kelly, who was considered a good judge of talent. Johnny, still discouraged, told Kelly that he was ready to call it quits, because of the lack of fights, and the fact that his manager wasn't doing the job that he should've been doing. It was then that Kelly pointed out Jimmy De Vito, who was training Bobby Boyd.

"He's working for a fellow named Glickman," said Kelly. "This Glickman fellow is alright, and seems to be well liked, and if I were you, I'd talk to him."

Kelly called De Vito over, introduced the pair, and before long Johnny signed a contract with Glickman. The pair seemed to hit it off right from the start, and Holman's first start under the Glickman banner was in the Rainbo Arena. Johnny won that on a TKO. The following month Johnny lost to Larry Watson, but in a return bout he knocked Watson out in four rounds. At this point in his career, Johnny began get-

ting pains in his left arm. At first they were dismissed as minor muscle-pains, and before long Johnny was unable to let go with a jab. He winced with pain whenever he was hit on the forearm, but suddenly the pain had left him, and Johnny told Glickman that his arm was fine. But Glickman was disturbed, and after Johnny was stopped by Toxie Hall, Glickman urged Johnny to forget the ring, and gave him a job in his awning factory. But Johnny was restless, and kept insisting that he was all right and could fight.

Glickman then decided to take Johnny to a bone specialist in Chicago. After a thorough examination, the doctor told Glickman that Johnny's arm was paralyzed at the elbow because of a chipped bone.

The operation turned out successful, and four months later, Holman returned to the ring to knockout George Powell in three rounds in Detroit. Not too long after that, Glickman shipped Holman to Miami Beach, and hired Angelo Dundee to supervise Johnny's training program. After knocking out Cesar Brion for the first time in the Argentinian's career, Holman was matched with former heavyweight champion Ezzard Charles last March 27th, 1955, in Miami Beach.

Before the fight, both Glickman and Dundee told Holman:

"If you beat Charles, you'll move up to number 5 or 6 in the ratings. You'll be able to get that house you've always wanted."

During the late stages of the bout with Holman far behind on points, Glickman whispered to Holman: "You're losing the house, and the fight."

So Holman dropped Charles in the ninth round, and when the fight was finally stopped, Holman's first words on reaching the corner were:

"Well, now I've got my home!"

Right now Johnny's most important plans are getting to the top in his chosen profession, and purchasing his own home. His wife Inell, and their two children, John, Jr., 7, and Patricia, hope to move into their own home in the next few months.

Johnny saves his money, and at this writing has more than \$9,000 saved, with his manager Bernard Glickman banking his money for him. Johnny stands 6 ft, three inches tall, and his best fighting weight is around the 206 pound mark.

He's described by trainer Dundee as a heavy puncher, who when he gets his shot in, usually spells finis to anyone."

Manager Glickman and Holman would both like a crack at Hurricane Jackson, and then a crack at Mraciano's crown. Whether Johnny will get a shot at the Rock, is up to the International Boxing Club. But his principal goal, to become a householder, seems certain to be reached.

With a record of 42 professional fights, winning 29, losing 12, boxing 1 draw, and scoring 17 knockouts, Holman has become the fair-haired boy in Chicago, with many fight experts giving him a great chance against the Rock.

Although losing a 12 round decision to Bob Baker in his last fight in what was considered an elimination affair, Holman impressed with his gameness and cannot be discounted in the long run.