

# The Boxing Biographies Newsletter

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## Nevada State Journal

### 27 September 1942

Old time fight fans in Nevada, those who remember Tex Rickard and his early promotional ventures, probably consider the Jeffries- Johnson fight in Reno, on the Fourth of July in 1910, as the outstanding event in the state's Pugilistic Golden Age. From a financial point of view, the attending galaxy of "names" at the ringside and the news significance of the upset that Johnson's victory brought about, the fight far exceeded in importance the loss of Jim Corbett's title to Bob Fitzsimmons at Carson City on St. Patrick's Day in 1897. But that was before Tex Rickard and the \$100,000 purse he offered for the Jeffries-Johnson fight.

If those old time fans happened to see Joe Gans fight Battling Nelson in September, 1906, at Goldfield and Kid Herman on New Year's Day at Tonopah in 1907, They say the Greatest Fighter Who Ever Lived. Gans won both of those fights. Nelson lost on a foul in the forty-second round when his rough tactics became too obvious and George Siler, the referee, had to call a halt. Gans had the Dane outclassed from the start but there are still a lot of stories going around about some "queer" things about that fight. Even though he won, Gans got the smallest end of the purse. In his other appearance in a Nevada ring Gans stopped Herman in eight rounds. But winning those fights was not what made Joe Gans the Greatest Fighter Who Ever Lived.

#### Greater Proportion

In proportion to their numbers the Negroes have produced a larger percentage of great fighters than any other race. Today the greatest box office attraction is Joe Louis. And it has always been that way; when a Negro was good he was REALLY good. Tom Molyneaux, of the early nineteenth century days of blood and bare knuckles, left a record that compared favorably with any of the great English fighters. Molyneaux born a slave in Virginia, was one of the first Americans to take up pugilism, Later there was Peter Jackson for whom John L. Sullivan created

the color Line, or rather the color line was created for John. Have it either way, but Jackson never got the crack at the championship to which he was entitled.

Then there was George Dixon, Little Chocolate who was a terror among the little fellows until too much gin and Terry McGovern got him. Joe Wolcott a, five foot high welterweight, would tackle anything that walked, regardless of weight or height. Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion, was considered by many to be the strongest and best defensive fighter of all the big fellows. Sam Langford. who could fight as a middleweight or a heavyweight, should have been a champion. No one would risk his title against him ,that's all.

Later on Kid Chocolate came along. He was a little Cuban Negro newsboy who learned to fight hustling sheets in the streets. of Havana. He beat everything that was dished up to him and fought almost every week, but the same as George Dixon, he liked gin and burned out at the height of his career. Everyone familiar with the sport pages knows about Henry Armstrong and what he could do, and still can do.

But the daddy of them all, the champion of all races, was a coffee-colored Baltimore boy named Joe Gans, who demonstrated with his two hands the perfect coordination that man is capable of developing between mind and muscle. If boxing is to be considered an art, Joe Gans is surely its Old Master.

### **Named by Tad**

Gans was named the Old Master by the late Tom Dorgan, the famous "Tad" of the New York Evening Journal, "rubber stamp," "rubber check," "speakeasy" and the famous phrase, "**Yes, we have no bananas.**" For many years Tad was a recognized Boxing authority.

About thirty years ago he asked fans to send into the office of the Journal the name of the man they thought was the greatest fighter who ever lived. Thirty years ago there were many fans living who had seen Sullivan, Jackson, Corbett, Dixon ,Dempsey the Nonpareil, McAuliffe, Lavigne, Fitzsimmons, Griffo,et al. But when it came to naming the man who combined everything that the others possessed as a single attribute entitling them to greatness, Joe Gans, the lightweight, was their selection.

Tad said of Gans, years later, "***He was the greatest fighter I had ever seen; never wasting a move, nothing was an effort for him. And he fought flat footed, getting his strength in every blow he let go. Also he was the most modest fighter I have ever met***",

About fifteen years later this writer asked the readers of the San Francisco Bulletin who they thought was the greatest fighter who ever lived. Another generation of fans had developed during the time elapsed since Tad had received the response from his readers in New York. Those 1926 San Francisco fans had seen Ketchell, Attel, Johnson, Dempsey, Kilbane, Jeffries, but the majority of them picked Gans as the best they had ever seen. If memory serves correctly, the letters favored Gans two to one over the others. When a fighter gets the nod from two such widely separated groups of fans over a period of fifteen years there must be pretty substantial material in the pedestal on which he stands.

Born in 1874, Gans started fighting in 1891 and fought for eleven years before he won the title. Given a terrible beating by Frank Erne the champion, in 12 rounds in New York in 1900, Gans waited until 1902 before he got another crack at the title, when he finished Erne in one round.

When he was defeated by Battling Nelson, at Colma in California, in 1908, the long fingers of the White Plague had already started to choke him off. Two years later he was dead in Phoenix, Ariz. Joe Gans' monument is made of the milestones in his career that others pass trying to follow in his Footsteps. There can be only one **Greatest Fighter Who Ever Lived.**

## **Reno Evening Gazette**

**3 September 1906**

### **The Fighters Touch Scales At weight**

**Ten Thousand Spectators that Trouble Will ensue if**

**Any One Enters Ring During Progress Of The Contest**

ARENA, Goldfield, September 3.

That part of Goldfield which slept last evening awoke early this morning to the brightest and most perfect September day that can be imagined.. At 9 o'clock nearly every resident of the mining town was on the main streets to greet the throng of visitors that had arrived on the trains during the night. That busy artery of traffic; was soon congested, and at 9 o'clock, when the bands began to play, the various holiday sports started up and the crowd was fairly awake, the scene was one to thrill the most sluggish blood of strangers and "**Old Timers**" alike.

Every able bodied man in the state that could escape his business is in Goldfield today. Fully 3,000 from the east and west are also here.

At the restaurants and places of refreshment It is: impossible to get served without waiting in line. The crowd is of the most cosmopolitan character, Men of note in the world of literature, art, finance, mining, sport, and the other great fields of activity are rubbing elbows and struggling for places of vantage with the rough-looking miners and the most peculiar gathering of human flotsam and jetsam that ever added color to the lively scenes of a mining camp.

Goldfield is literally overrun. It is delirious with excitement . Judging By the large sales of tickets this morning the attendance at the fight will be in excess of 10,000. Nearly every sporting man In town believes that the fight will be fair, and it is generally believed that it will prove one of the greatest and most spectacular fights ever held in the world regardless of class.

The betting is strong with so much Gans money in sight that the odds are going to 10 to 6 on the colored fellow, and shortly before noon the deadlock that has practically existed in the betting for two or three days, owing to both sides holding out for prices, was broken. Money began to change hands rapidly, and in most cases bets were made at odds of 10 to 8, with the negro favorite. The San Francisco delegation that arrived early this morning on special trains has a preponderance of Gans money to wager, and it looks as if they will be accommodated by the short-enders.

The sports of the morning started off with a rock drilling contest on the main street in front of the banks and the Montezuma club. At the word of the timekeeper two husky Miners, bare of arms and chest, leaped onto the platform. One with a huge sledge hammer, the other with a drill. With ponderous blows and unerring aim the man with the hammer drove in the drill for five minutes, while the other held it straight with stoical indifference to the possibility of a false blow. Then they changed places, and the drill man swung the hammer. At the end of fifteen minutes time was called and the men, perspiring freely from their efforts, desisted.

The hole was measured and found to be exactly 38 ½ inches in depth. A second brace of miners jumped on the platform and tried to beat the performance. They failed, as did a third and a fourth, and when after a fifth set of men had only made 34 inches the referee handed \$500 in gold to the winner. There was loud and prolonged applause that strained fully 5000 husky throats.

Immediately it became necessary for half that number to "licker up," and a rush set in for the Northern, the Monte Carlo, the Palace, the Texas and a half dozen other popular places of refreshment that can only be compared to the first great rush to the Klondike.

Thus it was that the festivities of the day, the greatest day this little town of the desert has ever known, started off. Most of the crowd started to see the events which followed, the various races between contestants of both sexes, the burro race with its laughable complications, and the greatest enthusiasm provoking event of the whole morning, the race between the two Goldfield hose companies. But a large number, and among them many of the well-known sporting men, climbed into rigs and automobiles—any sort of conveyance they could obtain to save themselves a walk along the white, hot, dusty roads of alkali and set off to see the fighters.

The training quarters of both men were thronged from 10 o'clock on to lunch time. The confidence of the fighters wrought their respective admirers up to a fine frenzy of excitement, and there was continual running to and fro of courtiers and betting commissioners. Wine flowed in the proverbial way and when under its influence men began to grow bold and brave, there was much talk of what would happen in the event of a "fake". There was the usual amount of speculation during the morning of possibilities in this direction. Breathlessly it was passed from mouth to mouth that Gans had been offered \$30,000 to "lay down". Only the added statement that Gans had steadfastly refused all bribes allayed the feeling that flared up like a prairie fire in a gale of wind. The action of Larry Sullivan in severing his managerial connection with Gans at the last minute caused endless discussion and several suspicious ones were inclined to believe that there was "something behind it".

Both Nelson and Gans weighed in a second time at 1:30 o'clock. Neither one of them juggled the beam. They both wore the garb they will use in the contest. President Rickard has just announced that the actual size of the purse is \$33,500 to be divided in the following manner; Nelson to get \$22,500 and Gans \$11,000. Nelson would not agree to fight until this amount was assured him. This agreement has been kept secret until the present time as Rickard did not wish to interject any more angles than already had been "sprung".

## **KNUCKLES AND GLOVES BY**

**BOHUN LYNCH .**

**WITH A PREFACE BY**

**SIR THEODORE COOK**

**First Impression, October, 1922**

### **CHAPTER I**

**PETER JACKSON AND FRANK SLAVIN**

**Edited version**

Frank Slavin, as we have seen, was one of those boxers of the transition period who overlapped. He had fought both with bare knuckles and with gloves. Both he and Peter Jackson were Australians, and both claimed the championship of that country. The contest at the National Sporting Club was said to be for the World's Championship, but that is a phrase which on no occasion means very much. All that matters for our present purpose is that the match was an important one between two fine and evenly matched men.

Peter Jackson has been called the "first black Gentleman." He was born in the West Indies in 1861, and went as a lad to Australia, where, in Sydney, he was a fellow-pupil with Slavin of Larry Foley, who in turn had sat at the feet of Jem Mace. Indeed, in the past, Slavin had himself given Jackson lessons in boxing. The black had only once been beaten, and in 1891 he had fought a draw of sixty-one rounds with James J. Corbett. In those days an unlimited number of rounds that is, a fight to a finish had not been prohibited in all the states of the Union, and this remaining custom of the Prize-Ring was much abused. The battle took place at the California Athletic Club, at San Francisco, for a purse of 10,000 dollars. It was a poor affair. Jackson hit straight, Corbett crooked. But the white man was cleverer than the black at avoiding punishment by clinching at the psychological moment. Often he refused to break away until the hissing of the crowd became a positive menace. For the last fifteen rounds there was no boxing at all. The men were utterly exhausted: Corbett had hurt an arm, two of Jackson's ribs were broken. The referee at last declared the fight a draw. He might just as well have done so much earlier.

The match took place on May 30th, 1892. The National Sporting Club had not been long founded, and its theatre was packed to its extremest limit. The contest was to be one of twenty

three-minute rounds, and four-ounce gloves were used. Jackson's chief physical advantage was a slight superiority in reach, but it was known that Slavin's strength was prodigious, and his right-hand punch on the ribs, his best blow, was famous and terrific. He was a harder hitter than Jackson, and though up to the end of the sixth round his blows were not so many as his antagonist's, they meant more. Before the men entered the ring that night, Slavin said (Mr. Corri tells us in his book, *Thirty Tears a Boxing Referee*) : " To be beaten by a black fellow, however good a fellow, is a pill I shall never swallow.'

**It is unwise to say that sort of thing.**

It has been said, too, that Slavin taunted Jackson in the ring. However that may be, the splendid black man was confident in his quiet, unassuming way, and he at all events held his tongue. His method of fighting too, was orthodox and cool. When at the beginning of the first round Slavin came charging at him, Jackson put out his long straight left, and the white man was shaken by the blow. It was his policy to get close to Jackson so that he could bring off his tremendous body-blow. It was Jackson's policy to keep him away and to box at long range, and he did this. Some young man had once said to Jackson at the club: "*They tell me you black chaps don't like being hit in the stomach ?* " " Can you," Jackson replied, "*tell me of any white man who does ?*" But there is no doubt that negroes are, as a rule, weaker in the stomach than white men, unless like Jack Johnson, the more recent champion, they especially cultivate the abdominal muscles. No doubt Jackson knew, too, that one of Slavin's blows was worth two of his : but he boxed with quiet assurance and defended himself with vigilant care. Again and again Slavin rushed at him and tried to force his way close in: again and yet again Jackson propped him off, reserving his strength while Slavin dissipated his. Slavin was the favourite when the men entered the ring, but it is notorious that the greatest gamblers will, in boxing, back a white man because he is white.

Peter Jackson did not entirely avoid all the white man's blows, but his footwork was wonderfully good, and even when he failed to guard against them, he generally managed to be moving away when a blow landed, so that most of its power was lost. He seldom gave Slavin a chance to put in one of his regular smashers. And in the meantime the accumulated force of the black's many but lesser hits, together with the energy wasted by Slavin in futile charges across the ring, weakened the white man. Up to the sixth round it was any one's fight, though Peter Jackson was an easy winner on points up to that time. But what are points, after all, against one punch whether it is deliberate or "lucky," which ends a fight And Jackson very nearly fell a victim to just such a punch. He had never relaxed his vigilance, he never presumed on his opponent's weakness. He attacked when he saw a safe opening, and for the rest contented himself with holding Slavin well away with that beautiful long straight left. And yet at the end of the sixth round he was all but beaten. Frank Slavin was getting desperate. The men were fighting for a big money prize, but it is unlikely that the 1750 which would be the winner's share was foremost in the white man's mind as he strove in the ring. Jackson was a good black fellow, but he was black, and Slavin's pride of race was very strong in him.

Rightly or wrongly, he felt that there was a peculiar shame in accepting defeat from a nigger. But he knew that he would have to make haste. Good as his condition was, these six hard rounds had taken much of his strength. He drew every breath with labour: and though many of a boxer's movements, whether in offence or defence, are instinctive, the work was very hard work, his

light boxing boots were like the boots of a diver, his knees shook a little as he stood still. He was very weary. But he meant to win. He gathered himself up and hurled himself at Jackson, and by sheer determination and weight forced the black across the ring to the ropes, and then with all his weight behind it he sent in his tremendous body-blow. Mr. Corri, who was sitting near the ring-side, tells us that it "seemed to spring from the calves of his legs and upwards to the muscles of his right shoulder and right arm." And, "I have never seen such an expression of consummate deadliness upon a human face as that which spread across the features of Slavin at this crucial stage."

The blow doubled Jackson up "like a knife." It caught him just under the heart and the sound of it was heard throughout the hall. The black man gasped and reeled. The onlookers were completely silent save for an involuntary "Oh!" which here and there forced itself to utterance. Had Slavin hit Jackson but half a minute earlier in the round he must have won. The black was helpless. Slavin must have finished him. As it was, before the white man could follow his advantage, the round ended, and Peter Jackson and Frank Slavin Jackson had a minute in which to recover. In his corner, and loud enough for Mr. Corri to hear him, Jackson said to his seconds, "If he hits me like that again, I'm done." And his seconds worked on him, sponging, massaging, fanning, doing all that they could to restore him. When time was called for the seventh round Jackson, though no doubt weak, had recovered. He appeared to be strong and fit again, and appearances in these circumstances are beneficially deceitful. And in despite of his momentary elation in the last round, Frank Slavin came up tired.

But Jackson had to be careful, and he knew it. He did not lead, but kept his guard rigid, and "used the ring" that is, by brilliant footwork he kept out of danger, avoiding the ponderous and slackening rushes of his adversary. When the eighth round started, Peter Jackson had quite recovered, and Slavin was slower and more weary than ever. His weakness was evident. But it must not be thought that his was a mere exhibition of brute strength run to seed. Far from it. The white man boxed well, and he, too, kept out of danger. In the next round, however, Jackson sparred with great brilliancy, piling up many points, while just before the end he shot out a particularly good left. Slavin was obviously desperate now, and grew careless of the punishment he received, staking everything upon the chance of bringing off another mighty blow.

And yet weary as both were by now, they came up quite jauntily for the tenth round. Slavin shot out a fierce left, but it only just touched Jackson as he moved back. He rushed at the black man again, and this time Jackson avoided him altogether. Thrice Slavin dashed in with furious left and right quickly following each other. And the third time he tried this, instead of stepping back, Peter Jackson came in to meet him, and ducking Slavin's blows, planted his own left, followed by the right in immediate succession, on the white man's jaw. The second blow came over with terrific force, and Slavin reeled. But he still stood and swung wildly at his man without thought of guarding, his senses almost gone, and only a desperate pluck to keep him from falling. Jackson followed him and rained blows upon him, until Slavin stood still hardly able to lift his hands. Whereupon Jackson, good sportsman that he was, turned to Mr. Angle, who was refereeing the match, and raised his eyebrows. "Experience," say the Annals of the National Sporting Club, "has repeatedly shown that there is always a punch left in a big man, even when he appears disabled. Dallying at such a crisis is dangerous. Jackson, however, turned round in the

most chivalrous manner and looked at the referee. The rules of the game were beyond dispute. Mr. Angle said: "Fight on."

There was nothing more to be said: "*I must finish him, then sorry, Frank,*" and with obvious distaste he went in. Even then in his anxiety not to hurt the man he did not hit hard, and Slavin took five blows before he went down. His courage was exemplary. He could so easily have fallen. He stood, however, and took the blows like the man he was. At the fifth he fell forward on his knees and in a blind, instinctive effort to rise again, not knowing what he was doing, he clutched Peter Jackson round the legs. But he could not rise. The ten seconds were counted. For the first time in his life Frank Slavin was beaten, for the first time knocked out.

And Peter Jackson took his victory quite calmly. Without a trace of swagger he returned to his corner, and, later, helped to carry Slavin, who was really ill, out of the ring.