

The Boxing Biographies Newsletter

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Letherbridge Daily Herald 17 November 1917

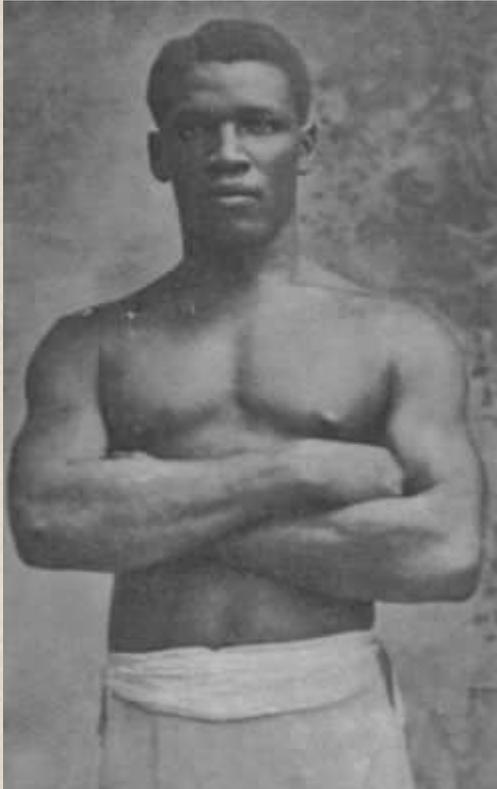
Harry Wills, who is matched with Jack Dempsey to fight for the world's heavyweight championship sometime next year, is the most prominent boxer of his race today, although far below the class of many great negro fighters in past years. Wills has a poor record for a championship contender, 'having made no great showing against the men he has fought, and having been extremely careful to pick easy marks and avoid all risks of defeat ever since he was first mentioned as a possible opponent for Dempsey. Also he has been much criticized for his use of hold and hit tactics in his fight's, contrary to all rules of fair boxing. He seems unable to go through a fight without using this trick.

But there have been some wonderful men among the negro fighters. Almost invariably they have been honest, clean fighters and good sportsmen. I can say here that among all the fighters I have known, in following the sport closely for thirty years, there are none for whom I retain more respect than little George Dixon, Joe Gans, Joe Jeannette, old Peter Jackson and Sam Langford. These were as fine fighting men as ever were seen in the ring, square, courageous, skilful and sportsmanlike under all circumstances.

Trained With Jackson

One of my earliest recollections in the boxing line is of a time when Peter Jackson, freshly over from Australia, trained at a roadhouse near a little town called San Leandro, in California. Joe Choynski, a great fighter although unfortunate in being pounds lighter than the average heavyweight, trained with Jackson. Peter was a courteous, quiet big fellow. He avoided all arguments and was always willing to fight any heavyweight under any terms in the ring, but unwilling to engage in any of the brawls that were common among fighters in those days. In short, Peter was a thorough gentleman.

Peter Jackson One Great Fighter



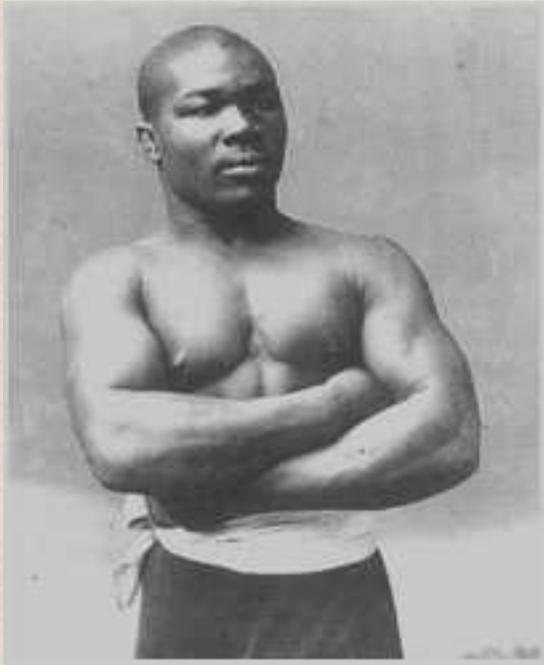
A wonderful fighter, Peter Jackson, Sullivan drew the color line when Jackson challenged. Sullivan might have been willing enough, although far past his prime when Peter Jackson appeared, but his backers issued their orders, and in those days a fighter's movements were practically controlled by the backer who put on his side stakes. Peter went to England, knocked out Frank Slavin in ten rounds, and became such a social favorite that after six years of it he was a physical wreck. On the way back to Australia in San Francisco, and was matched with a young fellow named Jim Jeffries, then little known. In the first round Peter had his old flashy speed, but none of his ancient deadly punch. In the third round Jeffries knocked Peter nearly out. The old lion of the ring staggered to the ropes, and catching them in his arms braced himself to take the finishing blow. Jeffries dropped his hands and said to the referee:

"I won't hit him again. You'll have to stop it."

Peter Jackson, by the way, was born in St. Croix, West Indies. To go back a century or more in black ring history, the first colored man to achieve international ring fame was Bill Richmond, an American negro who went to England shortly after Figg's time, and won many battles on the turf. Long afterwards Tom Molyneux, a Virginia negro, went to England as a servant of an American traveler and took up fighting, at which he had been adept among the plantation darkies of his old home. Molyneux stayed in England and twice fought desperate battles with Tom Cribb, English champion and one of the greatest fighters of the century. This was back about 1809. Cribb beat Molyneux, but was practically finished as a fighter in doing it. Prize fighting was a desperate business in those days, all fights with bare fists and to a finish. Molyneux was entertained so lavishly by the English sporting society that he died within a few years.

Frank Craig, the Harlem Coffee Cooler, went to England and knocked out a long list of fighters, nearly all in one or two rounds. English sportsmen thought Craig the greatest of all champions. He was a very clever fighter, and a clean fighter. He was eventually knocked out by Peter Maher, and then by Frank Slavin. Craig fought his first battle in 1891, his last in 1922, Thirty-one years in the ring!

Walcott Beat Many Heavyweights



Another dusky champion was Joe Walcott and known as the Barbados Demon and the Giant Killer, because of his extraordinary fighting powers. Walcott wasn't a boxer. He was only an inch over five feet tall, weighed 142 pounds in his best condition, had a sixteen inch upper arm and the strength of a heavyweight. He was too short to hit, and when he dived under an opponent's guard and began driving furious blows into a bigger man's body something had to drop. Walcott was perfectly fearless, and he thought he could whip anything that walked on two legs.

When Jim Jeffries knocked Fitzsimmons for the world's heavyweight championship Tom O'Rourke, Walcott's manager, got Joe into a corner of his bar at the old Delavan on 40th and Broadway, and said: "Joe, how would you like to fight Jeffries?" "Get him for me, Mr. O'Rourke," said Joe grinning. "I'll knock him loose from that title." Joe was then world's welterweight champion. O'Rourke did challenge Jeffries to fight Walcott, and was laughed at. Of course such a match would have been ridiculous. Walcott, however, did fight and knock out Joe Choynski, who had once fought a twenty round draw with Jeffries. He knocked out many other heavyweights. His punches wouldn't have even disturbed Jeffries, who was an iron giant.

O'Rourke fell out with Tom Sharkey, whom he had been managing, and tried to get Tom to fight Walcott. "***What are you trying to do—make a joke on me?***" roared Tom.

Walcott's finish as a champion was peculiar. He was attending a fancy dress colored ball in Boston, his home town, and in the dressing room was fooling with a gun. Joe was holding in it his left hand and had the muzzle in it his left hand foolish. In some way the gun was discharged, shooting away a couple of Joe's best hitting knuckles and incidentally removing an adjacent gentleman of color from his vale of tears. Joe was exonerated by the coroner's jury, but he never could fight very well afterward, and was whipped by Honey Mellody, a very able welterweight who held the title for some time.

Sam Langford was one of the best fighters in the world. When only a welterweight he was beaten by Jack Johnson, heavyweight, but gave Johnson such a bruising fight that Johnson never would meet him again when Sam grew up. Langford should have been heavyweight champion for at his best there is little doubt he could have beaten Johnson if given a chance. He was wonderfully built—a squat Hercules—was lightning fast, a tremendous hitter, game as they make 'em, and as fine, clean, sportsmanlike a fighter as ever lived.

Sam is still boxing around a little, although age had "grabbed him" and for many years he had been blind in one eye and nearly blind in the other. Half blind, fat and long past his best fighting days, he was still good enough to knock out big Harry Wills twice, in 14 rounds in 1914 and in 19 rounds in 1916. This was when Wills was young, fast and at his best. He fought about ten no-decision fights with Wills, and wasn't decisively beaten by Wills until 1918, when Sam had been fighting sixteen years. Wills stopped Sam in six rounds. At that time Sam couldn't see well enough to avoid a punch, and had to feel for his man to deliver a blow. But the game old veteran was still fighting. After that he won the championship of Mexico and knocked out Battling Gahee, Jamaica Kid, big George Godfrey and a few more.

Gans Always. Fair in Fights

Joe Gans, once lightweight champion and peer of all boxers in his class, was as white a fighter as ever lived. Joe was clean and fair no matter how the fighting went. He could get up from a knockout and fight his way to a win as calmly as if nothing had happened. Joe never held his man with one hand to punch with the other. He never hit a low blow. He never lost a fight on a foul and never deserved to. He was the most deliberate, masterful boxer of his time — with the sole exception of Bob Fitzsimmons, from whom Joe learned his fighting style. Joe once told me that when he began fighting he saw Fitzsimmons meeting all comers, and was so fascinated that he followed Fitz for two weeks watching him every night and studying every move the master made. And game! When Joe Gans was dying of tuberculosis he fought Battling Nelson twice in San Francisco, was knocked out in 17 rounds, and two months later in 21. I saw Joe fight his one bout after that with Jabez White in New York, ten rounds with no decision. It was a slow fight—a very poor fight for Joe Gans. The crowd thought he was faking and razed him unmercifully.

After the fight I went out to Joe's dressing room to see what he had to say about it. He was sitting in a chair with a towel thrown over his shoulders, despondent and exhausted, breathing with difficulty.

. "This is the last, Mr. Edgren," he said. "They don't understand but I'm done. I've been trying to cover it up so I could make a little money for my family. I did my best, but I can't fight any more. I'm through "

A few months after that strangers carried Joe Gans in on a stretcher and put him aboard a train in the Arizona desert to send him home to die. He died on the way. Game from the beginning to the end Joe Gans!

Jack Johnson

It is an anti-climax, after this, to add a line about Jack Johnson, but Johnson was a world's champion and a great boxer. Cunning, cautious, lacking the boldness of other black champions, Johnson perfected a defence that kept him practically out of danger in any fight, and he had the skill and the punch to win when his opponent was worn out. Gigantic, powerful, he had no

trouble winning the championship from little Tommy Burns when he had a chance to fight for it at last, and at Reno he disposed of Jeffries when the veteran tried to come back after six years away from the ring. After that Johnson's career was a series of blunders that may be excused on the ground that he was an ignorant man suddenly bewildered by much money and the adulation of such parasites as gathered around him. He atoned for it when he fought one game fight at Havana, giving everything he had until he was utterly exhausted, and sticking after hope was gone, until Willard knocked him cold.

Black men have been big part of the picture in ring history. They always will be. As a race they're built for the game, and on average they have as much heart for it as men of any other race or colour.

End

THE CHARLESTON DAILY MAIL, SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 22, 1928 .

A HERITAGE OF FISTS COMES AGAIN

By WILLIAM MOFFAT

When "Honest Tom" Heeney that indefatigable scrapper who is always ready to take two to give one climbs into the ring to meet Gene Tunney for the championship of the world, he will revive the memories of thirty an forty years ago when other champions of Australia came from the land of down under in search of championship honors and American gold.

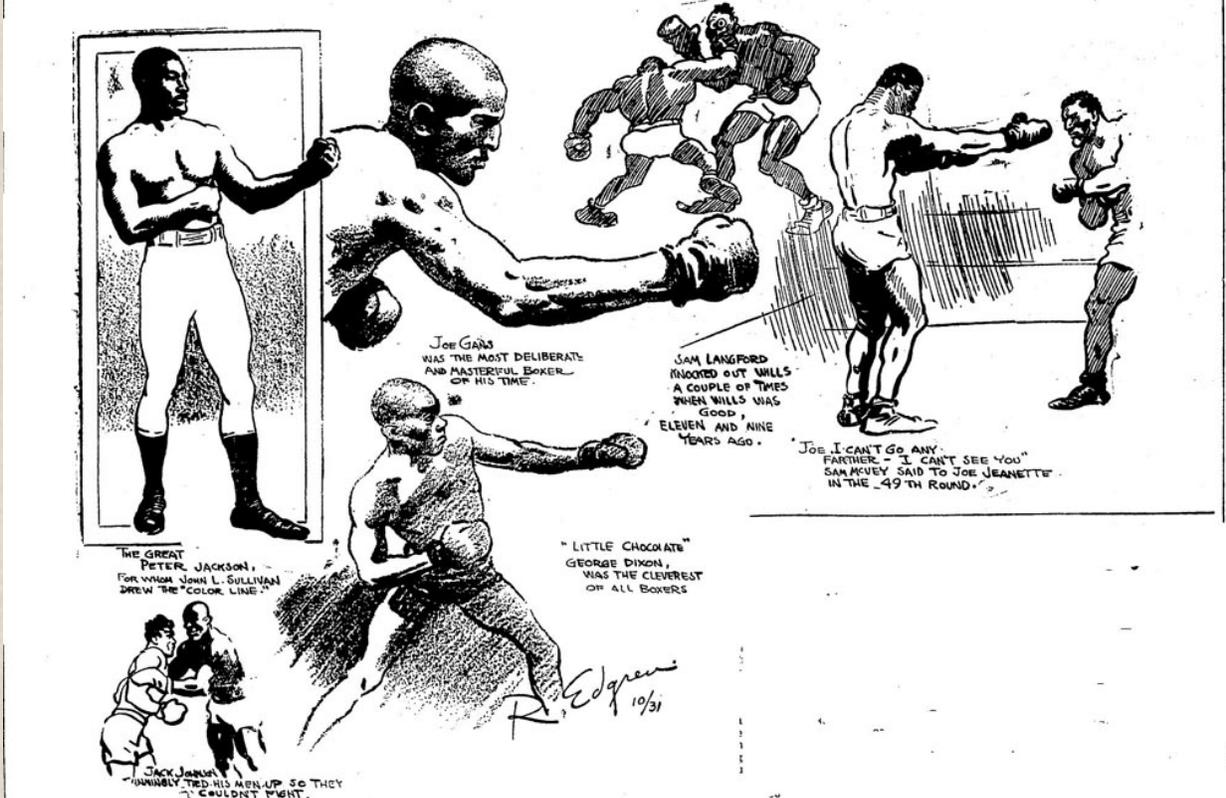
During the decade from 1880 to, 1890 an apparently endless stream of good fighters — and many of them were fully entitled to be called great — poured into America from the country of the kangaroo. It was a subject of wonder how a small a land, in point of population could produce so large a pugilistic output.

Peter Jackson, the only man John L. Sullivan ever declined to meet, Robert Fitzsimmons at his weight probably the greatest fighter who ever lived; "Young" Griffo and "Gentleman George" Dawson — all champions of their classes in Australia — headed the list.

On nothing Heeney has shown in his meteoric rush to the front in fistic circles does he measure up to the standard of Fitzsimmons and Jackson, for they were diamonds of the first water, but at least he is the best heavyweight that has come from the land of down under since those giants passed away.

Four-fifths of the fighters who came from Australia in the heyday of boxing in that country were graduates of Larry Foley's Gymnasium — Foley's "Iron Pot"—an annex of that ex-pugilist's White Horse Saloon in Pitt street, Sydney.

Colored Race Has Given The World Great Fighters ... POSSESS BUILD AND HEART FOR RING GAME ...



A millionaire backer gave it to Foley when he won the championship of Australia from Abe Hicken one-time lightweight champion of England and middleweight champion of America. Soon the "Iron Pot" became the Mecca of aspiring fighters from all parts of Australia and New Zealand.

The presiding genius and influence at Foley's "Iron Pot," the man to whom a great many of these Australian fighters owe at least the completion of their fistic education was an American, Jack Thompson the bookmaker, an uncommonly clever boxer and fighter. As a boy of sixteen he had fought for the preservation of the Union. Later after he had won two bare-knuckle fights in America, he sailed for the Antipodes to join his two older brothers. Joe and Barney, who had established themselves as leaders in the Australian betting ring.

It was to Thompson that Jem Mace sent Bob Fitzsimmons after the latter won the amateur championship of New Zealand, beating Mace's protégé, Herbert Slade, the Maori fighter.

It was on Thompson's advice that Peter Jackson made his first tour of America under the management of Sam Fitzpatrick and it was the same Thompson who after two ineffectual attempts finally got "Young" Griffo to make the voyage to San Francisco.

Bob Fitzsimmons was not overburdened with this world's goods when he arrived in Sydney, and it was Jack Thompson who slipped him a ten pound note and gave him his first showing at the

"Iron Pot." It was at Foley's too, that Bob Fitzsimmons met his first really good opponent — Jim Hall. For Hall was a good man at that time, a very different Hall from the man Bob beat *so* easily at New Orleans three years later.

The idea widely prevails that in the fight at Sydney. Fitzsimmons "lay down." And he is reported to have admitted tacitly, by his silence, that he did so. But as a ringside spectator, we are not inclined to believe that Bob "threw" this fight. Rather we are perfectly certain that the New Orleans affair was simply a frame-up, with Fitz, of course, no party to it.

AT THE "IRON POT"



At the time of their first battle in Sydney, Hall was physically perfect, a very clever boxer with a powerful, straight left that carried the kick of a mule. He was unbeaten at the time he knocked out Fitz.

Griffo, probably the greatest defensive fighter that ever drew on a glove, made his first appearance at Larry Foley's "Iron Pot" as a graduate of the "Rocks Push," a gang which had its headquarters in the highest and rockiest part of the old City of Sydney, known as Millers point. From their rocky fastnesses the "Rocks Push" used to descend on Sunday mornings, for some of them were guilty of working occasionally during the week, and meet the "Haymarket" gang in battle array. The selected representatives of the rival gangs, the bantams, lightweights or heavies, would divest themselves of everything except their pants.

The gangs fought fairly. It was their code of honor to do so — about the only one they had. The stakes were far from large, ranging from "half a quid," or \$2.50 a side to somewhat larger amounts if some members of the gang had been lucky in finding work or money.

The stakes were placed in a hat or cap in public view in the charge of a sentry, who was armed with a bottle often a broken one to protect himself and the coveted treasure. Gloves were not used, but the fighters were required to show their hands, palms up, to make sure they were not carrying a piece of lead to add weight to their blow this was the environment in which Griffo learned the manly art of self defense. He was the undisputed lightweight champion of the "Rocky Push" when he made his first public appearance at Larry Foley's "Iron Pot." I saw that debut.

It was a markedly successful one. Before he had gone to his corner at the end of the first round Jack Thompson pronounced judgment on the newcomer. His verdict was brief and convincing. "He'll do," was the emphatic assertion of that master picker of fighting prospects. Griffo became part and parcel of the "Iron Pot." There he had all he wanted to eat and drink and every

opportunity for a scrap. There was nothing more wanting in the world, in Griffo's philosophy. Ambition? He had none, unless it was to beat any one that was put in front of him in the ring.

Strict training was abhorrent to Griffo. Road work was simply scoffed at, and yet he was always fit and could fight all day. On one occasion we saw him take on four opponents in succession, boxing a quarter of an hour with each — and stopping only long enough to consume four quarts of beer, one for each opponent.

Jack Thompson thought that a view of the world might infuse some ideas into this little fighting animal. So he arranged with Captain Morse to take Griffo to America. Thompson had undertaken a task. It was not until the third attempt that Griffo finally left for these shores. On the first occasion he simply ran away and hid until the Alameda had departed. On the liner's next trip Griffo stayed on board until the Alameda had sheered off from the wharf. Then suddenly he hopped off the rail and, without waiting to take off his coat, took a flying dive into the water and swam ashore.

The third time was attended with success, and Griffo reached San Francisco.

Peter Jackson in the writer's opinion, the best heavyweight that ever drew on a glove, was a longshoreman working on the Sydney wharves before he took up the fighting game and became a regular at the "Iron Pot" and a good friend of Jack Thompson. Peter had many personal qualities besides his fighting ability that made him the most popular pugilist that ever showed at Foley's. Poor Peter! He was everybody's friend but his own.

In the first year of his fighting career Jackson carried all before him, but the following year he met with an unexpected setback at the hands of Bill Farnan, a Melbourne blacksmith. Farnan had no particular ability as a boxer, rushing in wide open and relying on a pile driving right hand which he used a la Firpo. The fight took place at Williamstown, a harbor suburb of Melbourne. For the first two rounds Jackson made Farnan look like a novice; but in the third Peter got a little careless and the big blacksmith got in a crushing right which broke two of Jackson's ribs and settled the fight.

Fifteen years elapsed from that day before Jackson, then thirty seven years old and simply a shell, suffered the only defeat in his life, when Jim Jeffries knocked him out in San Francisco. That rib cracking wallop made Peter particularly careful, and when he met Farnan for the second time he gave the blacksmith very little chance to repeat the operation, getting there first with a powerful left that would have knocked the head of any one less sturdy than Farnan. Jackson was a sure winner when the police interfered.

It was after he had beaten everybody who cared to face him in Australia that Jackson, on the advice of Thompson, came to America and fought many battles over a period of three years under the management of Fitzpatrick. All his fights were either victories for him or draws. It was the disappointment of Jackson's life when John L. Sullivan stubbornly drew the color line and refused to meet him. He had looked forward eagerly to the chance of meeting Sullivan confident of his ability to cope with the rushing tactics of the "Boston Boy".

There was nothing to do but return to Australia. The fighting game was beginning to fall off there and, after a draw bout with Joe Goddard, Jackson returned to San Francisco where his memorable sixty one round draw with Corbett took place. A lot has been written about this fight, most of it praising Corbett's ability in standing off so formidable opponent, and some of it declaring Jackson an over rated fighter. But here is the story that was told to me by Eddie Graney.

Pen Pictures of the Old Champ By Laufer



About a week before the fight Jackson was thrown out of a buggy. His ankle was sprained so badly that it appeared impossible to avoid a postponement. That would have meant a forfeit. There was a good deal of betting on the match and Jackson's friends were anxious for several days, but kept the news of the accident quiet so as to give the bigger bettors a chance to lay off some of their money.

However, drastic remedies brought about sufficient recovery to avoid the postponement. Orders were issued to Jackson to save the injured ankle as much as he could and not to go after Corbett. Everybody knows that his speedy

footwork was always one of Corbett's chief assets. He was a very fast man. so Jackson's handicap, under the circumstances, may be easily imagined.

With the exception of a couple of minor battles in Chicago, both of which he won, Jackson had no big engagement from the time of the Corbett draw until he met Frank (Paddy) Slavin at the National Sporting club in London. This bout presented the peculiar spectacle of two Australians

fighting in London for the championship of England. Slavin had earned that title by beating the muscle bound English champion Jim Smith at Bruges, in Belgium.

We remember the fight well and can visualize it now. When the two men entered the ring their appearance gave every indication that they were going to put up a fight that was to be a pippin. It was. Despite long lay-offs, both were in the pink of condition. Each had formulated his plan of battle. Jackson was to follow the precept of his friend and adviser Jack Thompson: "Keep your right till your opponent is groggy." Slavin was to try to drive home the one murderous punch that was his best asset, a right hand, half swing, half uppercut, that started from his hip. He knew Jackson's weakness, the ribs that were broken by Billy Farnnn years before, and he was determined to break them again. But Jackson relied on his accurate and powerful left to get there first.

Nearly a minute of the first round went by, the fighters creeping near, breaking a bit. and then getting nearer again, fiddling for an opening, when bang! Jackson's left shot out with a force that rocked Slavin to his heels. Another murderous smash as Slavin attempted to rush to close quarters, and the fight was on in earnest.

For nine rounds it was fast fighting, action all the time, Slavin gamely trying to get past the Negro's cruel left that never missed its mark, taking his punishment without flinching and boring in again. Only once did the punch drunk Slavin attempt to fall into a clinch. Then the big Negro pushed him away with the same ease with which Jack Johnson handled Jim Jeffries at Reno and sent him to the canvas with a right hand smash. Not until the ninth round did Jackson begin to use his right. And in the tenth, propping his man into position with his left Jackson shot over a right that finished the fight.

Jackson took no chances and gave his opponent no openings. It was a triumph of scientific boxing, a combination of accuracy, judgment of distance and correct timing over brute force and power.

It was not until six years after his victory over Slavin that Peter Jackson, enfeebled by fast living and the inroads of the tuberculosis to which he eventually succumbed, was knocked out by Jeffries . Ruined financially and physically, he was assisted back to Australia.