

MY STORY OF MY LIFE

BY JAMES J. JEFFRIES



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CHAPTER V.

HARD WORK GOOD FOR FIGHTERS, ESPECIALLY IRONWORKING.

I DIDN'T go right along fighting after knocking out Griffin in my first professional battle. I went back to hard work. It did me good. The very best men I've known in the ring were all men who had worked hard at some time or other and who kept it up to some extent even when in training. The routine of a



PLASTERING OUGHT TO BE GOOD FOR THE PUNCHING MUSCLES.

training camp, running on the road and punching a bag and boxing, isn't enough to produce the best effects.

As great a man as James J. Corbett was when I first knew him, I'm satisfied that he would have been stronger and would have had more endurance if he had done heavy work now and then. He was an exception to the rule, for he lived a fairly easy life all the time when not training to fight, only boxing for pleasure and playing handball.

Bob Fitzsimmons was a horseshoer and didn't begin fighting until he was a full grown man. During his years in the ring he liked nothing better than to slip away somewhere every day or two and turn out a lot of horseshoes. Ruhlman was an ironworker like myself, and strength helped him out more than skill in the ring. Sharkey was a great fighter because working as a sailor for several years made him strong as a bull. Hard work and exposure to the weather toughened him and made him a dangerous man. Sharkey was at his best when he began to fight. He never learned much about boxing and was better off when he didn't try to do anything but rush in and slug. For his size he was a wonder, and in our two fights I couldn't help admiring his gameness and toughness. He never got that in training camps.

Other fighters that I never met in the ring because they were of a lighter class have told me that they never fought so well as when they were hard at work. Tommy West, for instance, was a great middleweight when I was among the new champions. West gave Tommy Ryan the hardest fight of his life and, although beaten, battered Ryan up so badly that he didn't get back into fighting shape for more than a year. West was a plasterer. During all of his early fights he worked at his trade. I've always thought that a plasterer's overhead work, smearing on ceilings, ought to be great for the shoulders and the muscles that drive a stiff punch.

West told me once that when he was working hard at his trade he never felt tired in a fight and that he could always hit his hardest in the last round as well as the first. When he began getting big purses and lived in a training camp all the time, running and boxing instead of handling a trowel, he could feel the difference in a short time. Often he went back to plastering, doing overhead work, just for the good it would do his fighting.

Working on a farm is very good because it is all out in the sun and wind, and there's nothing else like sunshine and fresh air for an athlete of any kind. Farming interests me as a training proposition, for I had a lot of it myself as a boy, and later on as champion of the world, with no more men at the time fit to give me a fight. I bought a big alfalfa farm and spent two of the healthiest years of my life doing a farmer's work with my own hands. It beat all the bag punching and rope skipping and boxing in the world.

But, although all of these varieties of hard work are good, and any other kind for that matter, I'll have to say that nothing really beats the ironworker's trade. The iron you handle

seems to get into your blood and your bones and your muscle.

After winning my first battle I was urged by Billy Gallagher to go on the road and fight everybody. But I was just a seventeen-year-old boy and didn't feel like leaving the old place yet. I'm glad I didn't, for the two years of hard work that followed helped give me a good level head, and if anybody needs one it's the young fellow who makes good in the ring.

I hardly knew whether I intended to take up fighting or not. I thought I might if I had a good chance, but I wasn't in a hurry. I boxed with Gallagher now and then. I had a pretty good opinion of my own cleverness; but, looking back today, I must admit that I got off easy sometimes when the newspaper writers called me a "clumsy giant" and a "young elephant." I fought to win, and I always did win, and with a knockout at that. What more can anybody want?

I was nineteen years old when Billy's urgings and the talk of my friends began to sink in. At last I grew tired of boxing for fun and decided to change my trade and take a chance. I was pretty well outfitted for fighting. At nineteen I stood six feet two or very close to it, weighed 228 pounds stripped and measured just thirty-three inches around the waist.

Billy Gallagher was quitting too. He had been doing a little fighting now and then and had been offered a match with Danny Needham, middleweight in those days. Billy was going to San Francisco to train, and wanted me to work with him.

After his fight he was to look around and match me against some heavy-weight.

It's lucky I didn't think much of the money end just about that time. Billy Gallagher and I went to San Francisco. Billy trained, and I worked like a horse with him, boxing and rubbing him down and making myself generally useful, not because I regarded the chance of getting coin out of it, but because he was my friend and I wanted to help him win. He fought Needham on the date set to a draw. He got his end of the purse, and then he skipped without leaving me a cent. That was my first acquaintance with the rough side of the game. They say there's no gratitude in a fighter. That was my opinion when I knew that I had been left in the lurch by my one friend. However, I figured it out that he probably needed the money more than I did. I was fat broke, but I wasn't a soft handed dude. I could fight somebody.

I did.

The gentleman's name was Dan Long, and he hailed from Denver.

The purse for that fight was a thousand dollars in good round, hard, useful United States twenty dollar gold pieces. It looked like a mint to me after knocking out a few dollars a day handling iron. That thousand dollars settled things. It made me decide that there wasn't any trade for me but slinging flats.

I have to laugh every time I think about that fight with Long. He was a good big fellow and strong enough and knew a little, so he had more of a reputation than I had.

Well, we got into the ring on the night of the fight, and as soon as the bell rang we walked into each other. I guess Long thought he'd lay me out. But I had seen that purse, and a cannon ball wouldn't have stopped me.

The first round might have been about an even thing. In the second I straightened my left arm out and punched Long right on the nose so hard that he dropped. The referee counted over him until he reached ten, and that was enough. I got the coin.

Looking back over my first two fights, I can't say that my style has ever changed very much. I have fought a lot of champions and have worked with a lot of good men like Corbett and Fitzsimmons in training camps, and yet that trick of crouching a little and using my left hand for the knockout blow has stuck to me. I get them all in the body.

I have never struck a man with my full strength, because I've never cared



BILLY SKIPPED OUT, LEAVING ME WITHOUT A CENT.

to risk the result. I knock my men out carefully. Even in the excitement of winning the championship from Fitzsimmons I put over the last punch just hard enough to do the work. It only needed a tap, and if I had hit full force I might have killed him. In our second fight Fitzsimmons cut me to pieces. He was the shiftest fighter in the world. He was trying to close my eyes and did have me nearly blinded. But for all that I judged my last punch and put it in with just force enough to win.

One reason why I've never struck a blow with my full force is that I've never felt myself being beaten down. If I ever do, then I'll draw on the last reserve, and whatever I hit is going to crack.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH I HAVE THE CHANCE OF MY LIFE AS CORBETT'S SPARRING PARTNER.

IT WAS easy money for me, that thousand dollars. Imagine getting a roll of twenty dollar gold pieces like that for simply boxing a round or two and then hitting the other fellow on the nose. Why, that would make a man's wages for six or eight months in the boiler shop, and at good pay too. I slipped some of it into the bank, but kept a few double eagles in my pockets just for the fun of bearing them rattle and clink. Some good clothes and a new Stetson with a brim as flat as your dinner table and a few ties hit my fancy. I was beginning to feel like a real sport.

To add to the joy of the occasion I was offered a match with another



"I KNOW JUST THE MAN YOU WANT," SAID WHITE TO CORBETT.

heavyweight, a husky fellow named Van Buskirk, formerly a member of the Olympic club and amateur champion, but now a professional and well thought of. One or two people told me that Van Buskirk would eat me, but I didn't think so. He was a big fellow with shoulders that would have touched each side of a doorway. These shoulders sloped up to his ears, leaving him without any neck worth mentioning. He had big blue eyes and pulled his eyebrows up until his forehead wrinkled. He stuck out his lower lip and looked as savage as he could when he talked about fighting, and his head was so flat behind that his thick neck bulged out beyond it. If you rolled a marble over Van's head from front to back it would drop into his collar. He had long arms like a gorilla's and fists like hams. They thought he was a terror, and he thought so too. We made the match.

I was very anxious to fight Van Buskirk and go after the next fellow, whoever he might be. But here my luck shifted. I don't know whether it was the change of climate or some foolish stunt or other, but anyway I suddenly went down with pneumonia. After a hard siege of it I found myself out on the street, thin as a rat and feeling so weak that I could hardly walk.

A month at home for a visit and a hunting trip, and then, feeling so strong and well that I couldn't stay idle any longer, I went north again, looking for trouble.

The first match I was offered was with Jack Stelzner. Jack was a fairly good heavyweight in his time and a fine fellow. He was a big, strong youngster who left firing a locomotive back east in Missouri and took up fighting. He might have had better luck in the ring if he hadn't attached himself to Bob Fitzsimmons for several years as sparring partner. Fitzsimmons was a rough man to work with. He battered Stelzner up so much that it took many a good fight out of him. Stelzner was in Carson with Fitzsimmons. He was hard at work, and the match fell through.

Just about this time a little thing happened that changed my whole fighting career. If I hadn't become acquainted with Harry Corbett in San Francisco I might have gone along for years fighting second raters.

Harry Corbett was one of Jim Corbett's brothers. There were several boys in the Corbett family, all interested in sport in one way or another. Joe about that time was pitching for the Baltimore Orioles. Jim of course was world's champion and was about to fight Fitzsimmons a championship battle up in the Sagebrush State. Harry was no athlete, but a good sport. He owned a cafe on Ellis street in San Francisco and in the rear of the large room had a pool room. Harry was known as an absolutely honest sport. I never saw the day when I would have hesitated over handing him every dollar I had and simply telling him I'd come back for it when it was needed.

Naturally being the most prominent sporting man in Frisco or in the west and being brother to Champion Jim Corbett, Harry Corbett looked as big as the president of the United States to me. So when one day he asked me if I'd like to join Jim at Carson and work with him the idea hit me about right. Harry sent for Billy Delaney, who was with Jim and had handled him in the great fight with Sullivan at New Orleans. Delaney came from Oakland, and Harry introduced us. Delaney looked me all over and then in his dry way asked me if I thought I could stand hard work.

"Because," he said, "Jim is a nervous sort of fellow and likes to drive hard. He doesn't want any late sleepers in his camp."

"Well," I said, "I don't know about Corbett, but no ironworker could ever set too hot a pace for me."

"And he's a hard man to work with," Delaney went on, trying to throw a scare into me. "You'll be lucky if he

doesn't scare you up a little."

"He'll be lucky if I don't put my mark on him," said I.

Harry Corbett laughed, and Delaney wasted no more time, but asked how soon I could pack my trunk. That was easy. I didn't bother with a trunk. I wasn't any Tod Sloane to come to Frisco with fourteen trunks and a dozen hat boxes. A good, big suit case and a furnished room satisfied my wants. The suit case was already packed. As it was cold over in Nevada and I didn't want any more pneumonia, I got a good overcoat. In a few days Billy Delaney and I left for Carson.

From Carson we drove out to Shaw's Springs, where Corbett was already working. It lacked only about a month of the big fight on March 17. I'll never forget my feelings as I stepped from the rig in front of the little mountain hotel and thought that at last one ambition was to be fulfilled. I wasn't fighting a champion yet, but within a few hours I'd know what it felt like to be punched by a real champion, and if I wasn't mistaken I would know what it felt like to punch one.

Charlie White was a great friend of Corbett's in New York. He was one of the best known sporting men in the east. He knew how to train fighters and was an experienced referee. They tell me that he brought out a lot of first class men in his time.

Gus Ruhlman was a big young fellow in Akron. He worked in a rolling mill or something like that, and when he wasn't working he played football.

After becoming a local champion Gus went to New York to go after something bigger. There everybody told him to see Charlie White.

After awhile along came the Corbett-Fitzsimmons match. Fitz went to Carson to train, and Corbett, who had been doing a lot of light work, fixed it up to start for Nevada. He was to have Charlie White as an adviser as well as Billy Brady, his manager, and Billy Delaney, who had trained him for the great fight with Sullivan in New Orleans.

"Charlie," said Corbett, "I don't want any clever sparrers to work with for this fight. Fitzsimmons is a rough, awkward fighter, and I want some fast big man who can go at me in his style."

"I know just the man you want," said Charlie, and he told Corbett all about the football player in Akron.

"He'll do," said Jim. "I play Cleveland and two or three towns on the



HARRY CORBETT INTRODUCED ME TO BILLY DELANEY.

way west. Wire him to meet me at the theater in Cleveland on Monday night so that I can look him over."

"Better wire him yourself. Your name on the telegram may cinch it," Charlie advised.

So Corbett sent Ruhlman a wire, and sure enough, when he got to Cleveland there was big Gus waiting for him. Corbett talked with him a little and had him go through a few motions. Then he told Gus to go back to Akron and pack his grip and wait until he got the word to start for Carson. Poor Gus did it. He quit his job packed everything he had in the world and sat down to wait. He might be waiting yet if he was a wooden Indian. Corbett forgot to wire.

And the reason why Corbett forgot to wire was that just after seeing Ruhlman he had a message from Billy Delaney. "I've got just the man you want," telegraphed Billy.

That man was Jim Jeffries, as you may have guessed.

Corbett sat down and thought it over. Finally he concluded that Billy Delaney being his old handler and Billy Delaney's man being a Californian like himself, he'd better stick to Billy.

A Promise.

"Pa?"

"What is it, my child?"

"When sis marries that lord will I have to call her 'your ladyship'?"

"It will not be necessary for you to do so, but it will be very nice if you care to."

"All right. Mebby I won't always do it, but I'll promise not to call her 'punkin' face' any more, anyhow."—Philadelphia Record.

Italics.

Italics are letters formed after the Roman model, but sloping toward the right, used to emphasize words or sentences. They were first used about 1500 A. D. by Manutius, a Venetian printer, who dedicated them to the Italian states; hence the name.

A Short Christmas.

"Christmas day is only three hours long in the Finnish town of Tornea," said a traveler. "I spent last Christmas there. At sunrise I got up to see my presents and to read my Christmas mail, and night had fallen before I got through breakfast."

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