

New York Herald
July 5, 1910

Negro, Never in Doubt, Fear or Trouble, Played All the Time, Says Jack London

Jeffries Lost His Old Time Stamina Somewhere Outside the Ring and Did Not Put Up as Strong a Battle as Did 'Tommy' Burns

'Golden Smile' Shines on Adversary, Trainers and 20,000 Spectators

'Did You See That, Jim?' He Asks of Corbett After Landing an Especially Vicious Punch and Clinching with His Adversary

Yellow Streak Question Unsettled

Jeffries, Eyes Closed, Loses His Defence

First Rounds Were Largely Johnson

Following Ones More Johnson and Close All Johnson

Battered and Staggering, Californian Goes Down Three Times in Last

Once again has Johnson sent down to defeat the chosen representative of the white race, and this time the greatest of them all. And, as of old, it was play for Johnson. From the opening to the closing round he never ceased his witty sallies, his exchanges of repartee with his opponent's seconds and with the spectators. And, for that matter, Johnson had a funny thing or two to say to Jeffries in every round. The golden smile was as much in evidence as ever, and neither did it freeze on his face nor did it vanish. It came and went throughout the fight spontaneously, naturally.

It was not a great battle, after all, save in its setting and its significance. Little Tommy Burns down in far-off Australia put up a faster, quicker, livelier battle than did Jeff. The fight today, and again I repeat, was great only in its significance. In itself it was not great. The issue, after the fiddling of the opening rounds, was never in doubt. In the fiddling of those first rounds the honors lay with Johnson, and for the rounds after the seventh or eighth it was more Johnson, while for the closing rounds it was all Johnson.

Johnson played, as usual. With his opponent not strong in the attack, Johnson, blocking and defending in masterly fashion, could afford to play. And he played and fought a white man in a white man's country, before a white man's crowd. And the crowd was a Jeffries crowd. When Jeffries sent in that awful rip of his the crowd would madly applaud, believing it had gone home to Johnson's stomach, and Johnson, deftly interposing his elbow, would smile in irony at

the spectators, play-acting, making believe he thought the applause was for him—and never believing it at all.

The greatest battle of the century was a monologue delivered to twenty thousand spectators by a smiling negro who was never in doubt and who was never serious for more than a moment at a time.

As a fighter Johnson did not show himself a wonder. He did not have to. Never once was he extended. There was no need Jeff could not make him extend. Jeff never had him in trouble once. No blow Jeff ever landed hurt his dusky opponent. Johnson came out of the great fight practically undamaged. The blood on his lip was from a recent cut received in training which Jeff managed to reopen.

Jeff failed to lead and land. The quickness he brought into the fight quickly evaporated, and while Jeff was dead game to the end, he was not so badly punished. What he failed to bring into the ring with him was his stamina, which he lost somewhere in the last seven years. Jeff failed to come back. That is the whole story. His old-time vim and endurance were not there. Something has happened to him. He lost in retirement, outside of the ring, the stamina that the ring itself never robbed him of. As I have said, Jeff was not badly damaged. Every day boys take worse lacings in boxing bouts than Jeff took today.

Jeff today disposed of one question. He could not come back. Johnson in turn answered another question. He has not the yellow streak. But he only answered that question for today. The ferocity of the hairy-chested caveman and grizzly giant combined did not intimidate the cool-headed negro. Many thousands in the audience expected this intimidation and were correspondingly disappointed. Johnson was not scared, let it be said here and beyond the shadow of a doubt. Not for an instant did he show the flicker of fear that the Goliath against him might eat up.

But the question of the yellow streak is not answered for all time. Just as Johnson has never been extended, so has he never shown the yellow streak. Just as a man may rise up, heaven alone knows where, who will extend Johnson, just so may that man bring out the yellow streak, and then again, he may not. So far the burden of proof all rests on the conclusion that Johnson has no yellow streak.

And now to the battle and how it began. All praise to Tex Rickard, the gamest of sports, who pulled off the fight after countless difficulties, and who, cool, calm and quick with nervous aliveness, handled the vast crowd splendidly at the arena, and wound up by refereeing the fight.

Twenty thousand filled the great arena and waited patiently under the cloud-flecked wide Nevada sky. Of the many women present, some elected to sit in the screened boxed far back from the ring, for all the world like olden Spanish ladies at the theatre. But more, many more women, sat close to the ringside beside their husbands or brothers. They were the wiser far.

Merely to enumerate the celebrities at the ringside would be to write a sporting directory of America—at least a directory of the 400 of sportdom and of many more hundreds of near four hundreds. At 1:56, Billy Jordan cleared the ring amid cheers, and stood alone, the focal point of 20,000 pairs of eyes, until the great Muldoon climbed through the ropes to call tumultuous applause and ringing cheers from the 20,000 throats, for the State of Nevada, the people of Nevada and the Governor of Nevada.

Beginning with Tex Rickard, ovation after ovation was given to all the great ones, not forgetting Fitzsimmons, whom Billy Jordan introduced as “the greatest warrior of them all.” And so they came, great one after great one, ceaselessly, endlessly, until they were swept away before the greatest of them all—the two men who were about to do battle.

It was 2:30 when Johnson entered. He came first, airy, happy and smiling, greeting friends and acquaintances here, there and everywhere in the audience, cool as ice, waving his hand in salute, smiling ever smiling, with eyes as well as lips, never missing a name nor a face, placid, plastic, nerveless, with never a signal flown of hesitancy nor timidity. Yet was he keyed up, keenly observant of all that was going on, even hearing much of the confused babble of tongues about him—hearing, ay, and understanding too. There is nothing heavy nor primitive about this man Johnson. He is alive and quivering, every nerve fiber in his body and brain, withal that it is hidden, so artfully, or naturally, under that poise of facetious calm of his. He is a marvel of sensitiveness, sensibility and perceptibility. He has a perfect mechanism of mind and body. His mind works like chain lightning and his body obeys with equal swiftness.

But the great madness of applause went up when Jeffries entered the ring two minutes later. A quick superficial comparison between him and the negro would lead to a feeling of pity for the latter. For Jeff was all that has been said of him. When he stripped and his mighty body could be seen covered with mats of hair, all the primordial adjectives ever applied to him received their vindication. Nor did his face belie them. No facile emotion played on that face, no whims of the moment, no flutterings of a light-hearted temperament. Dark and somber and ominous was that face, solid and stolid and expressionless, with eyes that smouldered and looked savage.

The man of iron, grim with determination, sat down in his corner. And the carefree negro smiled and smiled. And that is the story of the fight. The man of iron, the grizzly giant was grim and serious. The man of summer temperament smiled and smiled. That is the story of the whole fight. It is the story of the fight by rounds.

At the opening of the first round they did not shake hands. Knowing the two men for what they are, it can be safely postulated that this neglect was due to Jeff or to the prompting of Jeff's corner. But it is not good that two boxers should not shake hands before a bout. I would suggest to these protagonists of a perishing game, if they wish to preserve the game, that they make the most of these little amenities that by custom grace their sport, and give it the venter of civilization.

Both men went to work in that first round very easily, Johnson smiling, of course, and Jeff grim and determined. Johnson landed the first blow, a light one, and Jeff, in the clinches, gave a faint indication of his forthcoming tactics by roughing it, by crowding the negro around and by slightly bearing his weight upon him. It was a very easy round, with nothing of moment. Each was merely feeling the other out and both were exceedingly careful. At the conclusion of the round Johnson tapped Jeffries playfully on the shoulder, smiled good-naturedly and went to his corner. Jeff, in the first, showed flashes of cat-like quickness.

Second round, Jeff advanced with a momentary assumption of his famous crouch, to meet the broadly smiling. Jeff is really human and good-natured. He proved it right here. So friendly was that smile of Johnson, so irresistibly catching that Jeff, despite himself, smiled back. But Jeff's smiles were doomed to be very few in this fight.

And right here began a repetition of what took place down in Australia when Burns fought Johnson. Each time Burns said something harsh to Johnson, in the hope of making him lose his temper, Johnson responded by giving the white man a lacing. And so to-day, of course, Jeff did not talk to Johnson to amount to anything, but Corbett, in the corner, did it for Jeff. And each time Corbett cried out something particularly harsh, Johnson promptly administered a lacing to Jeff. It began in the second round. Corbett, in line with his plan of irritating the negro, called out loudly: "He wants to fight a little, Jim."

“You bet, I do,” Johnson retorted, and with that he landed Jeff a stinging right uppercut.

Both men were tensely careful, Jeff trying to crowd and put his weight on in the clinches, Johnson striving more than the other to break out of the clinches. And at the end of the round, in his corner, Johnson was laughing gleefully. Certainly Jeff showed no signs of boring in, as had been promised by his enthusiastic supporters.

It was the same story in the third round, at the conclusion of which the irrepressible negro was guilty of waving his hands to friends in the audience.

In the fourth round Jeff showed up better, rushing and crowding and striking with more vim than hitherto shown. This seemed to have been caused by a sally of Johnson’s and Jeff went at him in an angry sort of way. Promptly Jeff rushed, and even ere they came together, Johnson cried out:

“Don’t rush me, Jim. You hear what I’m telling you?”

No sign there of being intimidated by Jeffries’ first dynamic display of ferocity. All he managed to do was to reopen the training cut in Johnson’s lip and to make Johnson playful. It was most anybody’s round, and it was certainly more Jeff’s than any preceding one.

Round five brought Jeff advancing with his crouch and showed that the blood from Johnson’s lip had turned his smile to a gory one. But still he smiled and, to balance things off, he opened Jeff’s lip until it bled more profusely than his own. From then until the end of the fight Jeff’s face was never free from blood, a steady stream later flowing from his right nostril, added to by the opened cut on his left cheek. Corbett’s running fire of irritation served but to make Johnson smile the merrier and to wink at him across Jeff’s shoulder in the clinches.

So far no problems had been solved, no questions answered. The yellow streak had not appeared. Neither had Jeff bored in, ripped awfully, nor put it over Johnson in the clinches. Yet one thing had been shown. Jeff was not so fast as he had been. There was a shade of diminution in his speed.

Johnson signaled the opening of the sixth round by landing stinging blows to the face in one, two, three order. Johnson’s quickness was startling. In response to an irritating remark from Corbett, Johnson replied suavely, “Too much on hand right now,” and at the same instant he tore into Jeff. It was Johnson’s first real, aggressive rush. It lasted but a second or two, but it was fierce and dandy, and at its conclusion it was manifest that Jeff’s right eye was closing fast. The round ended with Johnson fighting and smiling strong, and with Jeff’s nose, lip and cheek bleeding and his eye closed. Johnson’s round by a smile all the way through.

The seventh round was a mild one, opening with Jeff grim and silent, and with Johnson leading and forcing. Both were careful, and nothing happened, save that once they exchanged blows right niftily. So far, Jeff’s roughing, and crowding and bearing on of weight had amounted to nothing. Also, he was doing less and less of it.

“It only takes one or two, Jim,” Corbett encouraged his principal in the eighth round. Promptly Johnson landed two stingers. After a pause he landed another. “See that?” he chirped sweetly to Corbett in the corner. Jeff showed signs perceptibly of slowing down in this round, rushing and crowding less and less. Johnson was working harder and his speed was as flash light as ever.

Jeff’s slowing down was not due to the punishment he had received, but to poorness of condition. He was flying the first signals of fatigue. He was advertising, faintly, it is true, that he had not come back.

The ninth round was introduced by a suggestion from Corbett, heroically carrying out the policy that was bringing his principle to destruction. “Make that big stiff fight,” was Corbett’s

suggestion. “That’s right; that’s what they all say,” was Johnson’s answer, delivered with the Chesterfieldian grace across his adversary’s shoulder. In the previous rounds Johnson had not wreaked much damage with the forecasted punch, the right uppercut. In this round he demonstrated indisputably that he could drive the left hand in a way that was surprising. Be it remembered that it had been long denied that he had any sort of a punch in that left of his. Incidentally, in this round he landed a blow near Jeff’s heart that must have been discouraging.

The tenth round showed Johnson, with his deft, unexpected left as quick as ever, and Jeff’s going slower and slower.

The conclusion of the first ten rounds may be summed up as follows: The fight was all in the favor of Johnson, who had shown no yellow, who had shown condition, who had shown undiminished speed, who had not used his right uppercut much, who had developed a savage left, who held his own in the clinches, who had not the best of the infighting and the outfighting, who was unhurt and who was smiling all the way. Jeff was in bad shape; he was tired, slower than ever, his few rushes had been futile, and the sports who had placed their money against him were jubilant. There were men who proclaimed they saw the end.

I refused to see this end, for I had picked Jeff to win, and I was hoping hugely—for what, I did not know; but for something to happen, for anything, that would turn the tide of battle. And yet I could not hide from myself the truth that Jeff had slowed down.

The eleventh round looked better for Jeff. Stung by a remark of Corbett’s, Johnson rushed and provoked one grand rally from Jeff. It was faster fighting, and more continuous than at any time in the preceding ten rounds, culminating in a fierce rally, in which Jeff landed hard.

Round twelve found Johnson, if anything, quicker and more aggressive than ever.

“Thought you were going to have me wild?” Johnson queried sweetly of Corbett.

As usual, every remark of Corbett’s brought more punishment to Jeffries. And by the end of this round the second of two great questions was definitely answered. Jeff had not come back.

The thirteenth round was the beginning of the end. Beginning slowly enough, but stung by Corbett, Johnson put it all over him in the mouth fighting, and all over Jeff in the outfighting and infighting. From defense to attack, and back again, and back and forth, Johnson flashed like the amazing fighting mechanism he is. Jeff was silent and sick, while, as the round progressed, Corbett was noticeably silent.

A few entertained the fond hope that Jeff would recuperate. But it was futile. There was no come back to him. He was a fading, failing, heartsick, heartbroken man.

“Talk to him, Corbett,” Jeff’s friends appealed, in the fourteenth round. But Corbett could not talk. He had long since seen the end.

Yet through this round Johnson went in for one of his characteristic loafing spells. He took it easy, and played with the big gladiator, cool as a cucumber, smiling broadly as ever, yet as careful as ever.

“Right on the hip,” he grinned once, as Jeff, in a desperate, dying flurry, managed to land a wild punch in that vicinity.

Corbett, likewise desperate, ventured a last sally. “Why don’t you do something?” he cried to the loafing, laughing Johnson. “Too clever, too clever, like you,” was the response.

Round fifteen, and the end. It was pitiful. There happened to Jeff the bitterness that he had so often made others taste, but which for the first time, perforce, he was made to taste himself. He who had never been knocked down was knocked down repeatedly. He who had never been knocked out was knocked out. Never mind the technical decision. Jeff was knocked

out. That is all there is to it. An ignominy of ignominies, he was knocked out and through the ropes by the punch he never believed Johnson possessed—by the left, and not by the right.

As he lay across the lower rope while the seconds were told off, a cry that had in it tears and abject broken plea went up from many of the spectators.

“Don’t let the negro knock him out, don’t let the negro knock him out,” was the oft-repeated cry.

There is little more to be said. Jeff did not come back. Johnson did not show the yellow streak, and it was Johnson’s fight all the way through. Jeff was not old Jeff at all. Even so, it is to be doubted if the old Jeff could have put away this amazing negro from Texas, this black man with the unfailing smile, this king of fighters and monologists.

Corbett and Berger and the others were right. They wanted Jeff to do more boxing and fighting in his training. Nevertheless lacking the comeback as he so potently did, this preliminary boxing and fighting would have profited him nothing. On the other hand, it would have saved his camp much of the money with which it backed him.

It was a slow fight. Faster, better fights may be seen every day of the year in any of the small clubs in the land. It is true these men were heavy-weights, yet for heavy-weights it was a slow fight. It must be granted that plucky Tommy Burns put up a much faster fight with Johnson a year and a half ago. Yet the American fight follower had to see this fight to-day in order to appreciate just what Burns did against this colored wonder.

Johnson is a wonder. No one understands him, this man who smiles. Well, the story of the fight is the story of a smile. If ever a man won by nothing more fatiguing than a smile, Johnson won to-day.

And where now is the champion who will make Johnson extend himself, who will glaze those bright eyes, remove that smile and silence that golden repartee?