

The Battle of the Century:

THE BOBBY KENNEDY-

IN 1923 promoter Tex Rickard imported a huge, shaggy-haired Argentine named Luis Firpo to battle Jack Dempsey for the heavyweight title.

Canny Rickard billed the imbroglio, "The Battle of the Century," and the Polo Grounds in New York was jammed with the credulous who thought that the crude South American had a chance against the champion. The Battle of the Century was vicious enough, but it took only two rounds for Dempsey to render Firpo very unconscious indeed.

Ever since 1957, however, a fight has been going on between Robert F. Kennedy and James R. Hoffa which has a much better right to be called the Battle of the Century than the two-round affair promoted by Rickard.

It began when Bobby Kennedy, as chief counsel for the awkwardly named Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field, headed by Sen. John McClellan, submitted Hoffa to several grueling sessions before a tv audience estimated at 25 million people. (Only 82,000 saw the Dempsey-Firpo fight.)

Previously the Committee had gotten rid of Dave Beck as president of the Teamsters Union, and this, ironically enough, brought Hoffa to the presidency. To stretch a point, it might be said that indirectly the Committee placed Hoffa in the driver's seat. Then the Committee set out to get the aggressive head of 1,900,000 teamsters.

Hoffa spent 18 tough sessions before the Committee with counsel Kennedy doing most of the questioning. Unlike many of his associates, Hoffa did not seek sanctuary in the Fifth Amendment. He was questioned about some of his unsavory aids, about an alleged attempt to bribe a Committee investigator, about the allegation that he had tapped telephones of his subordinates.

On the stand Hoffa was unco-operative and slippery; time after time he resorted to the "I don't remember" technique. Kennedy kept after him relentlessly, but Hoffa, like a good boxer, deflected the verbal blows with evasive tactics. He was patronizing toward Kennedy. At one point he said, "But look, Bobby boy, you just don't understand these things." Kennedy went white with anger. There are those who say that it was that gibe which made Kennedy resolve to get Hoffa at all costs.

Hoffa emerged from the hearings battered and bruised but reasonably intact. Kennedy had proved beyond doubt that many of Hoffa's aids were gangsters, but there was no evidence that Hoffa himself had ever been a strong-arm man or that he had been derelict in dealing with the huge union funds virtually at his disposal.



And so the Senate Rackets Committee (as it generally was known) finished its hearings with 20,000 pages of written testimony, with the approval of the television public, and with an impetus that projected tenacious, tough-minded Bobby Kennedy into the office of Attorney General of the United States. The Washington correspondents who once called him Bob or Bobby now call him General, the traditional title accorded the head of the Department of Justice. On him the title looks good; his maturity is attested to by every Department of Justice lawyer I know (including a former member of the staff whom I once called "Whizzer" but who is now Mr. Justice Byron White of the Supreme Court).

Hoffa, too, has gained in experience and maturity. His grip on the enormous Teamsters Union seems stronger than ever, and a dozen times he has publicly defied the Attorney General and labeled his efforts as nothing but a "personal vendetta against Hoffa and his union." (Hoffa likes to refer to himself in the third person.) Hoffa sincerely believes that the Attorney General and his 1,700 lawyers will not be happy until he is not only removed from office but also helping to sew mailbags behind the unresponsive bars of a Federal penitentiary.

The Stakes Are High—for Both

Washington, D.C., is a city which has no industry; it doesn't produce food or first-division baseball teams—its only product is gossip. Drop into the sophisticated Jockey Club or visit the National Press Club or (if you're silly enough) attend the daily round of diplomatic, press, political, or social cocktail parties, and you'll hear a lot of gossip—a great deal of it concerning the feud between Kennedy and Hoffa.

It is generally agreed that this is a fight to the death. The stakes are high. If Hoffa loses, he will no longer be the most important union official in the country. If Kennedy loses, it could cost him the Presidency in 1968 (according to the betting in Washington, he is at present a shoo-in for the nomination).

The Attorney General has denied that this is a personal feud. He has not commented publicly on the Hoffa affair since he took office—nor would he discuss his feelings toward Hoffa when I talked to him recently. Not even off the record.

I saw Hoffa the same day in the imposing Teamsters Union building at 25 Louisiana Ave., just 1,900 feet from the Department of Justice building, and for once Hoffa had no arrows to shoot at Kennedy. In the past he has been quite free in attacking him, but during my visit he smilingly refrained from discussing personalities.

Few people in Washington seem to be neutral

JIMMY HOFFA FEUD

Here is a veteran reporter's analysis of the two tough men engaged in a knock-down, drag-out fight in which one of them is bound to get hurt

By **QUENTIN REYNOLDS**

Author of "London Diary," "Dress Rehearsal," "Courtroom," "Known But to God," and the forthcoming autobiography, "By Quentin Reynolds"

in this real Battle of the Century. When I was a sports writer 100 years or so ago, I was taught that the only way to judge the merits of two heavyweights was to maintain a high degree of objectivity. Suppose we use the same yardstick in trying to evaluate these two fighters battling in the judicial ring.

Physically and mentally they are well matched, and both have great staying power. Jimmy Hoffa weighs just under 180 pounds and stands five feet, five-and-a-half inches. He is barrel-chested and has strong hands—heritages of his early years of unloading heavy boxes from freight cars.

Physical fitness is a fetish with him; he spends half an hour each morning doing push-ups, and he neither smokes nor drinks. When he laughs, which is often, his dimples show, his white teeth gleam, and his hazel eyes laugh, too. His hair is coal black, and it is hard to believe that he is 50.

When you hear him make public speeches to his "boys" at a Teamsters' convention, he gives the impression of being an angry man, a self-appointed prophet, and a rabble rouser. But have lunch with him in the magnificent fourth-floor cafeteria in the Teamsters building (workers in the building call it, with considerable validity, the best restaurant in Washington), and you'll find Jimmy Hoffa a relaxed man of considerable charm, warmth, and humor.

His conversation is not limited to union matters. He reads all kinds of books; and when he discusses some recent serious novel articulately and intelligently, it is difficult to accept the fact that his formal education ended in the seventh grade. Immaculately and quietly dressed, impeccably barbered, he doesn't seem to have a trace left of the tough, snarling youngster who declared war on employers after his father coughed himself into an early grave, his lungs coated with coal dust.

The Family Men

Hoffa's home life is not unlike that of his opponent. He was married in 1936 to Josephine Poszywak, and they have two children, Barbara Ann, 24, now married, and Jimmy, Jr., 20. In 1939 Hoffa built a \$6,800 brick residence in Detroit. Today, although his salary is \$50,000 a year (plus the kind of expense account any important business executive is given), he still lives in that modest house. He travels a great deal, but whenever he can get away from Teamster affairs, he hurries home to his family. Like Bobby Kennedy, he is devoted to them and, like Kennedy, no breath of scandal has ever clouded his family relationship. Hoffa is known as a one-girl man, and "Jo" is his girl. She often accompanies him to conventions, not because she is interested in



union affairs, but because she likes to be with her husband.

If this picture of Hoffa seems too flattering, let me emphasize that it is the picture most of his close associates have of him; it is also the impression any reasonably objective observer gets. I am not trying to fit a halo on Hoffa's head—the thing wouldn't fit. I have no idea what goes on behind the bright, charming façade which he shows the world. Neither the Senate Rackets Committee nor the judicial charges leveled against him the past two years have been able to shatter his confidence—or his apparent contempt for the Attorney General.

Hoffa's confidence is bolstered by the fact that Kennedy has hauled him into court three times, and each time he has walked out a free man. He had a close call in a Nashville, Tenn., Federal Court, where he was accused of taking a round-about payoff from a trucking firm. The case ended in a "hung" jury, which was castigated by the presiding justice.

If at First You Don't Succeed . . .

Another test is imminent in the so-called Sun Valley case. Hoffa was indicted by a Florida grand jury for allegedly misusing a half-million dollars in Teamster money to develop a model city for retired persons in Sun Valley, Fla. The indictment was thrown out on the technicality that Negroes had been excluded from the grand jury. Kennedy has reinstated the indictment, this time carefully avoiding legal pitfalls. This trial will have far-reaching significance for both men.

Despite his pleasant private image, there is no doubt that Hoffa is the toughest, most ruthless labor leader of his time. He lacks the broader social vision which characterizes a man like Walter Reuther, head of the United Automobile Workers. Some of Hoffa's officers and many others with whom he does business would be more at home on "The Untouchables" television show than in any legitimate business. But the rank and file of the Teamsters' membership seem to have the happy faculty of ignoring the company Hoffa keeps; after all, they say, he negotiates better contracts for them than any of his counterparts in the union movement.

Hoffa is bitter toward Kennedy and his lawyers because he feels that, although unable to convict him in a court of law, they have convicted him in the public mind through legislative investigation. Union lawyers charge that the Senate Committee did in effect damn scores of men, including Hoffa, without giving them an opportunity to present their case. Edward Bennett Williams, Hoffa's brilliant attorney, has insisted that Hoffa and other officials of the Teamsters Union were ac-

(Continued on page 6)