

A VINEGAR CHAMPION

The Story of a Good Natured Giant Boxer who Never Could Knock Out His Opponents Until He Got Mad; then they Hit the Floor and Failed to Bounce Up.

By EDWARD H. LAWSON, Jr.

I found this guy working in a vinegar factory just outside of town, a place which I would not care to work in at any time, vinegar factory air not being particularly enjoyable to a sensitive person like myself. He was the biggest fellow I'd ever seen, husky and muscular and speedy on his feet; a heavy-bodied boy with a pair of hard fists and plenty of good muscle to back them up. I named him Kid Mangle, first time I glimpsed him in a scrap.

It was just luck on my part that I found him at all. I happened to be on the lookout just then for a good heavy to add to Billy Allen's string. Billy Allen is the biggest boxing promoter this side of New York, in case you don't know, and I happen to be his right hand man.

I had just driven out to the Laurel Boxing Club to look over a couple of fellows who had been training there. Neither of them was worthy of consideration, so I turned homeward. Just before I hit town I came upon this vinegar factory, and although in most cases I step on the gas and hold my nose while passing such a place, this time I was attracted by a crowd of husky workers who had gathered in the yard, cheering wildly as they watched a couple of boys scrap it out in the center of an improvised ring.

And were those boys earnest! I'm here to say they were. They were both big—about the same size, in fact—but the blinding speed and fury of attack of this boy I nicknamed Kid Mangle kept his sluggish opponent in a constant daze.

Fists streaking every second, the Kid would charge in. A right and a left and another right landed in the slower man's mid-section. A stiff right uppercut rocked his jaw. Right then and there I saw that this boy



A stiff uppercut sent the champion writhing to the canvas.

was plenty good. It took him just about two minutes to pummel his opponent out of commission. And how that other boy was torn up! He reminded me of a shirt after its fiftieth trip to the laundry, and that's no fooling.

"A natural!" I said to myself. "Give that boy a little training and he's headed straight for the big time. What could be sweeter?" I tried to catch him right then and get his signature on the dotted line, but lunch hour was over and the whole gang had to rush back to work. So I just forgot the odor of fermenting apples and sour vinegar long enough to catch him on the way out at quitting time.

"How much do you make around here?" I asked him, sort of abruptly.

He looked at me hard as though he thought it wasn't any of my business, which perhaps it wasn't, but then he answered: "Twenty-five per."

"I'll give you fifty," I offered, "and guarantee you a good scrap at least once a week. How does that sound?" He looked puzzled. "Say, what's your game, anyway?" he asked.

"I'm on the look out for a good heavyweight," I explained, "and you're it. Fifty per, free training, and only a couple of hours of real work a week is my offer. Are you on?"

"Listen," he said, "I've got a pretty good job right now, and jobs is mighty hard to get. Maybe I don't like the place—the smells and all. Nobody does. But is that any reason why I should give up my work in favor of some fly-by-night scheme like you got here?"

"This, my boy, is no fly-by-night scheme. I represent Billy Allen, who's got a million bucks behind him and maybe more. I've seen you fight around here, and if I know anything

you're a real comer. You don't want to work around a vinegar factory all your life, do you—for twenty-five a week?"

"Maybe not. But what can I do? It's steady work, and I get paid regular. And maybe after a while I'll be used to those vinegar smells. Most of the fellows are already."

I didn't want to lose this kid, so I jumped my offer up to seventy-five. He still seemed a little adamant, but just then we caught a knockout whiff of that vinegar-laden air. I was ready to pass out—and he was ready to sign. We both jumped in the car and I brought him back to the city with me.

The boss looked him over next morning while I put him through a stiff workout. He didn't show any particularly good form and he proved to be rather raw, especially in the infighting. But that was what was to be expected. What he did have was plenty of speed and stamina, the power to take it, and an intuitive "know" when it came to boxing.

"Looks like a good bet," the boss told me. "He'll make the grade if he's trained right. Keep an eye on him for me, will you?"

"Sure," I said.

"What's his name?"

"Willie Brown is what his mother calls him. I tagged him Kid Mangle—he used to press apples in a vinegar factory. Sounds pretty good, don't you think?"

"It's kay with me." He grinned a little.

I went over to show the boy how to punch the bag. The boss looked on a few minutes, then went out on business.

You'd be surprised how quickly this Kid Mangle developed after that. He was a natural fighter anyway, once you got him stirred up—but right there was the trouble. You had to get him really riled before he'd be-

gin to show what he could do. He was always sort of playful in the ring—until he got mad. My greatest problem was to get his fighting instinct aroused as soon as the opening gong sounded—not after he had taken a dozen sharp clips on the beizer. I thought the thing over mighty hard, but still no solution offered itself. So I had to let it slide for a while.

We watched the kid up with Micky Miers, a scrappy ofay heavyweight with a big edge of experience. The kid toyed around with him for three rounds—never really aggressive, content merely to hold his opponent off. And then he nearly gave us heart failure as he went down at the opening of the fourth for the count of nine, the result of a slashing right to the heart.

But he got up again. He was game, the kid was, and no quitter. And when he did get up there was a grimace in his face that boded no good for Ofay Miers. Ferociously now he rushed the older man, his pummeling fists beating a sharp tattoo upon the veteran's body. And in the next round a crushing left to the head, followed by a stiff right to the heart, sent the white man to the canvas!

"The boy's all right," the boss told me next day. "But you've got to get him started earlier. Three rounds there he was easy prey for anything Miers had. I doubt if he landed a dozen solid blows in all that time. Yet you see he can fight when he gets going."

I agreed with all that, but still couldn't think of any remedy. Other fights came along, and the very same thing happened—over and over.

In the battle with Tarbaby Mack, a glancing blow which slit his cheek woke the kid up after four frames of in-and-out fighting. With Killer Harris it was a low blow which the referee failed to see. With young Wills, a taunting threat that set

the kid afire. Of course, he finally came out victorious in all three scraps, which was all we could hope for, but the boss knew, and I knew, that our luck wouldn't hold out forever. We went ahead with our plans, though, and finally lined up Champ Norfolk, city heavyweight champ, for a six-round scrap.

"Get him mad!" the boss ordered me. "Do anything—but have him fighting mad when he climbs into that ring. It's the only way he'll ever beat this boy."

I moaned, remembering the many previous occasions on which I had attempted to aggravate him to a fighting frenzy without success. Still, I promised. Billy Allen was the boss.

The night before the bout, I sat and thought. And the more I racked my brain, the farther I was from a solution. Finally I dozed off to sleep.

It must have hit me in the middle of the night—that idea. At any rate, when I rushed down to the corner grocery to get what I needed, I found it closed and had to wait until morning. But after that, I wasn't worried any more.

I watched over Kid Mangle like a

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