

A
NEW FIGHT
STORY

The Catfish Kid

By the author of
"The Singing
Fullback"

He Came From the South Looking for Work and was Headed Toward New York. He was Hungry and Knocked at the Kitchen Door of a Training Camp for a Hand-Out. They Gave Him as Much Grub as He Could Eat and then Put Him in the Ring to Fight with the Champion.

By EDWARD LAWSON
INSTALLMENT I

Slug Wilson was in his prime that day in the training camp. He was bowling over the sparring partners which I and Billy Allen had picked for him in one-two-three order, and not even getting his hair mussed in the process. Sitting on the ringside with Billy, who is the boss, and a crowd of newspaper boys, I watched him as he went through three rounds with Jackie Davis in preparation for his big go with Mick Malloy which was less than a week away.

Three rounds was plenty and then some for Jackie, just as it had been for a couple of his predecessors. He was out on his feet when the gong sounded, and we had to carry him to his dressing room. I beamed at the sports reporters, sort of proud to have them know that I was Wilson's trainer, and then climbed into the ring to take care of him.

"You looked great," I told him. "Keep going like that for another week and there won't be a chance for this boy Malloy to take you over. He's a punk, that's all, and you're coming along fast. Keep it up, kid."

I rushed him down to have a little chat with some of the newspaper boys, and they talked to him for all

while and then I sent him to the showers.

"Well," I asked the boss after the crowd had cleared out, "what do you think?"

"He's coming along fine," Billy said. "Keep him working hard every day and we'll all set. Right now he looks like a million dollars. By Saturday he ought to be prime and ready."

"What did those newspaper guys think of him?" I asked.

"Oh," said Billy, "they don't know what they're talking about."

"But what did they say?"

"They didn't like the sparring partners we got here, for one thing. They got an idea they're all set-ups for a boy like Slug. You can't tell 'em nothing. But just wait 'till they see Slug bang over this Mick Malloy. They'll change their ideas then, I'll bet."

"Maybe so. I hope they will. But I kind of think they're right. We ain't got a boy in the outfit that can extend Slug any in these workouts. They just ain't good enough, that's all. And that, by the way, is the main thing we need—a good sparring partner for Slug. Got any idea where we can find one—quick?"

"Don't worry. Slug's all right as is. He's a comer and he's got his



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heart in the game. He'll be O.K."

"All right," I said, and then I went back into the dressing rooms to see how my boys were coming along.

Charlie Wilson, the rubber, met me with a gloomy look on his face.

I sensed trouble right away. "What is it?" I asked him. "Something wrong with Slug?"

"Nossuh," Charlie told me. "Slug's all right, but he's about the only one that is all right."

"How come?" I asked.

"Jackie Davis pulled up lame and won't be back in shape for a week or two yet. Dick Wells got a bad eye and the Doc says he'll have to lay off 'till it heals. Tommy Day busted a finger scrapping with Slug just now. There's all your sparring partners—shot. What you gonna do?"

I thought hard a minute.

"We'll have to get somebody else to stand up with Slug in the ring," I said. "We can't let him go stale on us just when we got him in the pink. We could get somebody new just for a couple of days."

"But who?"

I admitted that I didn't know who.

"Got any suggestions?" I asked.

He pondered the situation for a while but it didn't help any. I suddenly got an idea and told him not to worry. I followed him into the locker room, looked over my fighters' injuries, and then went up to the office to have a talk with Billy Allen. I told him my idea, which was to go in as a sparring partner for Slug myself, but I hadn't finished before he had turned thumbs down on that proposition. "I don't want to see you get mangled up, kid," he told me. "We can rig up a couple of pork-and-beaners somewhere who'll be glad to serve as lambs for the slaughter. I want you to stay out of this, see?"

So there I was, right where I had started.

The next morning, I happened to be moping around in the kitchen, feeling sort of gloomy and wondering what Billy was planning to do. Along about ten o'clock or so I heard a knock on the back door and, since the cook was out, I went and opened it. A rather dirty, disheveled fellow with a dark face and heavy-set form looked up at me hungrily and begged for a handout. I asked him how come, and he told me he had left his place in the South and had come North looking for work. He was headed for New York.

I told him there was even less work to be had in New York than anywhere else, and that it was pretty foolish of him to leave home with no better prospects than of ending up in a bread-line. I brought him in, though, and fixed up something for him to eat.

While he was chowing, I gave him the once-over, and boy! was I surprised at what I saw? He had those broad, bunched shoulders that knob up through a coat and don't require any padding—the kind that nothing but hard work, and plenty of it, can

create. His bulging chest pushed out a shirt-front not half so retreating as his stomach was; his arms were long and the hands that hung to them looked like unwrapped hams. "Boy!" I whistled to myself. "What a fighter he'd make."

Just like that I sized him up. When he was through eating I quizzed him: "Know anything about fighting?" I asked him abruptly.

He admitted that he didn't. "You come along with me anyhow," I ordered him. "I might have a little work for a boy like you."

Without a word, he followed me to the dressing room.

"Strip," I told him, "and get into these."

A few minutes later I was slipping the leather gloves over his hands, and he, mystified, was watching me with a puzzled expression.

"Come here, Whitey," I called to one of my lightweights who happened to be loitering around. "This boy's new and he's big for you, but I want you to take him over the three-round route while I look on."

Whitey Long looked the newcomer over first with disdain, but then with astonishment. I shooed them both into the ring and went over personally to give my boy some instructions. Then I started them in.

Whitey came in plenty fast and managed to get over almost a dozen telling socks before the big boy had any idea of what it was all about. But just as the first round ended, the husky Southerner caught—the idea and flailed into his lighter opponent. He slung leather fast and he slung it wickedly. Even the bell and my efforts to separate them were to no avail. Whitey went down, finally then was I able to ease my protegee into his corner and warn him to stop fighting when the gong sounded.

My warning wasn't really necessary. Twenty seconds after the second round had gotten under way,

Whitey was knocked cold by a stiff right uppercut

that resounded through the gymnasium. Right there I stopped



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the slaughter. "The boy's good," I told myself.

And I was right about that. Later on that very afternoon I put him in the ring with Slug Wilson, and right there was where things began to happen.

"He looks great to me," Billy Allen said just before I got them started. "What's his name?"

I had never thought of that, so I went over to where a couple of fellows were showing him the fundamentals of the game and asked.

"Catfish Johnson," he told me. "Leastwise, that's all anybody ever called me down home."

"That's plenty," I said, and went over to inform Billy.

He laughed. "Well," he said, "we'll simply call him 'The Catfish Kid.' That sounds O.K., don't it?"

"Sure," I said, and from that moment on, Mr. Johnson was never anything but the Catfish Kid.

"How long do you want to go?" I asked Billy.

The boss looked around. "You've got no others for Slug to work on?"

THINKING IT OVER

Natu, the African youth in Mary White Ovington's new book, "Zeke," tells his fellow students at Tolliver Institute, that "At home we love what God has made. Here you love what the factories turn out, a thousand at a time. We love the trees, and the wind in the leaves, and we worship the river. God dwells in it. We love our canoe. We feel the spirit in it guiding us as we find our way through the rapids."

Natu is right. We worship things, things, things. The lives of our men are cluttered up with making money, and more money, until too tired to walk out in God's great out-of-doors where one can stride along and fill one's lungs with air, and the smell of growing things. Our men tend to seek solace in cabarets, speakeasies, dance halls—never knowing that the moon is shining and the stars are dotting the heavens.

Tell a man to put on a slicker, an old hat, and rubbers, and walk out in the open with the rain in his face, and he will tell you you are silly and will invite you to warmer regions. Yet there is nothing more refreshing than the exhilaration that comes from the sting of wind and

snow or the patter of rain in the face.

And women are preoccupied with Watteau models in the spring and Empress Eugenie hats in the fall, and ensembles, and new shades of lipstick and rouge, and this and that, not mentioning husbands, or an overburdened boy-friend schedule with a job or two sandwiched in for good measure, and sometimes a little light housekeeping on the side. How are they to know that real violets grow in the spring and that dahlias will blossom forth anon?

Just imagine someone in this mad rush of living, dedicating one day of a too-brief vacation to nature worship. And yet, what could be better for tired, overwrought nerves, and overworked hearts, than a day of rest in a cool green spot with nothing and no one for company but the trees and birds?

Put on some old clothes and stake a bite to eat to keep starvation away and one friend if you can not stand the silence, and hite yourself out to a lovely spot away from folks, and listen to the song of the robin, the hum of the insects, and watch old King Sol rise in the heavens and descend. Erase all thought of yesterday or tomorrow from the mind.

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