

The Only American Bull Fighter



Agile Franklin, showing his skill for Spain's king and queen. . . . This sketch drawn from an action photograph.

By A. A. PRECIADO

"BULL fighting is just as dangerous as prize fighting, but more interesting and more honest. There can be no crooked work in the bull ring because you can't talk to the bull. You can't tell him to lie down and you will divide the purse with him. You either get him or he gets you."

You have this on the authority of America's only representative in the arena of blood and sand—Sidney Franklin, a Brooklyn boy, who never even saw a cow until he was 19 and then at a Long Island agricultural show. Now, at the age of 24, he is accorded the same measure of respect by Mexican and Spanish bull fight fans as Babe Ruth is accorded by the American baseball public.

For Franklin is not a bush league performer, to borrow a baseball expression, but one of the best in the bull fighting business. The most conservative rating places him among the first five performers in Mexico and there is nothing in the "record books" that keeps him from being rated with Rodolfo Gaona, Mexico's most famed matador.

The story of how this New York boy, born and raised among typical American surroundings, became a champion matador is unusual only because the ancient pastime of the Latin countries has had an appeal of almost exactly zero for American youths. Otherwise, Franklin has done as most other American boys have. He saw a field that attracted him and he became as skilled in that field as he could.

It is a far cry from the Brooklyn neighborhood where Franklin was born, and where his parents still live, to such places as Seville and Toledo where toreadors are born and made. But when he steps into the greatest bull fight arena in the world at Madrid, Spain, late this summer to match wits and agility with an infuriated bull, his mother, father, four sisters and three brothers in Brooklyn will be as much concerned in the outcome as the families of the Spanish matadors who come up from the provinces.

Franklin's boyhood days were spent in the usual American fashion. At school he was known as a good athlete, especially in swimming and track. He took up art in high school and liked it so well that he continued it when he entered Columbia University. Upon his graduation he went to work as a commercial artist for a New York advertising firm.

If that firm had stayed in business Sidney Franklin probably would not be a bull fighter today. But it didn't and Franklin was without a job for months. Then a friend in Mexico City offered him an opportunity to bring his art talents there and Sidney put the matter up to his parents. They advised him to go.

Helen, Sidney's oldest sister, says that if her parents had known what their consent was going to lead to, they never would have given it. But fate has a habit of taking a hand in the movements of human beings and so in a short while Sidney was not only engaged in art work in Mexico City but had seen his first bull fight.

The famed Rodolfo Gaona had been the matador and Franklin was thrilled by the spectacle. He described it in detail to his sister Helen and this is her version of it:

"THE Mexico City arena is a big amphitheater with tiers of backless stone seats which terrace up to the balcony and boxes.

The sounding of a bugle is a signal that the day's festivities are to begin. Two horsemen prance forward through the gates and go to salute the presidential box. After this brief rite they circle the ring in opposite directions and return to the gate.

There is another bugle call and this time the entire company, consisting of toreadors, banderilleros and picadores—each attired in bright-colored, tight-fitting uniforms—make their appearance. Again there is a brief ceremony before the presidential box and then everything is cleared for action.

The company scatters to places along the barrier which protects the audience from bulls that run amuck.

Another bugle call and a bull comes into the arena looking for trouble. The first persons to come in contact with him are the toreadors and the banderilleros. Using the red mantle, they toy with him. When the bull charges, they sidestep.

This routine is kept up for several minutes. Then the banderilleros enrage the bull by tossing festooned darts into his shoulders. Another matador then steps in and after becoming acquainted with the bull and his moods, proceeds to hypnotize him by waving the red mantle in his face.

The climax of the afternoon's performance is the killing of the bull. That's the matador's job."

That first performance in Mexico City settled Sidney Franklin's future. The drama of a beast and a man engaged in deadly combat intrigued him.

When Franklin told his desire to become a bull fighter to one of his Mexican friends he was laughed at, but nothing

could dissuade him. He hunted up the sources of information and learned that there were estancias outside Mexico City where he could learn the business.

He gave up his commercial art work and hunted up one where Rodolfo Gaona, the greatest matador that ever drew a sword on a bull in Mexico, was an instructor.

Learning to be a bull fighter is something like learning to be a jockey. You are taught on farms where bulls are especially bred for the sport. There you are supposed to become acquainted with the traits, habits and characteristics of the various animals.

In due course of time Sidney Franklin appeared in some of the smaller arenas in Mexico. These correspond to our bush league towns in the United States when you are talking baseball. Franklin got better and better from each experience and the Mexicans grew to like him.

On Sept. 20, 1923, he made his first appearance in the bull ring in Mexico City. It was at the Chapultepec ring, which corresponds to the Yankee Stadium in New York City. It was his big league debut and he startled the crowd with his skill and agility.

Shortly after this first major appearance the news reached the Franklin home at No. 19 Jackson Place, Brooklyn, that Sidney had become a bull fighter. It was shocking news to the folks. A family council was held and plans were discussed to get the boy back to America where he could engage in something less strenuous. They wrote letters but Sidney never answered. Still more letters. Silence. Finally they decided to accept the situation philosophically. "I suppose he likes the profession no matter how dangerous it is," the father said. "It would be useless for us to try to get him to break away from it."



"... You cannot tell the bull to lie down and let you divide the purse with him." . . . Here is another photograph of Treador Franklin in the bull ring.

FROM that time on young Franklin made frequent appearances in bull rings not only in Mexico City but throughout Mexico.

Soon he was known throughout the country as the only American bull fighter in existence. (There was one other American a few years ago, but he retired when he was injured.) Franklin has engaged in 200 bull fights and has come out with not a single scratch though he has had narrow escapes.

In one of his early visits home after his debut in Mexico City he spoke of the thrill of the game.

"There are accidents, of course," he said, "but they happen everywhere, even in baseball and football. The excitement and thrill of the thing make up for the danger, in my opinion."

"The Latins are more enthusiastic about bull fighting than Americans are about baseball. They will sit in the hot sun for hours to watch one. They admire bravery above

Brooklyn Born Sidney Franklin
Never Saw a Cow Till He Was 19,
But He Learned the Toreador Trade
In Mexico and Is Now in Spain
Getting Ready to Make His Debut
In the Big Ring at Madrid,
World's Center for This Most
Dangerous Sport Known



Sidney Franklin. . . . Tantalizing an enraged bull in Mexico City.



Helen, Rosalind and Charlotte Franklin. . . . Their brother tells them of bulls.



Mexico's Bambino of Bulls, Rodolfo Gaona. . . . He saw his own image in stone unveiled in the Mexico City bull ring. . . . Gaona, right, taught American Franklin the bull fighter's trade.

all else. Both matador and bull must be of the right stuff or they are hissed off the arena. If a bull cowers when he is struck with a three-handled knife he is taken out and another is substituted. And when a man does not rise immediately after he has been knocked down he is hissed out of the fight. But when he shows courage they go wild about him.

In Mexico it is generally admitted that the Spaniards are the best bull fighters, for youths of that country begin their training in boyhood. This intensive policy is not followed in Mexico. The country boasts of having five men in the profession who are equal in skill to the best Spaniards. One of these is Gaona and another is Franklin.

"His reputation must be deserved," his sister says, "because he has signed contracts to appear in the largest bull rings in Spain. It's like obtaining an engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House."

Franklin is tall and slender. He weighs about 180 pounds and has light blue eyes and light curly hair. "When he returned from Mexico City for a visit last winter," his sister says, "he did not give us the impression that he was engaged in a dangerous sport in a foreign country, but when he garbed himself for the edification of the family in a costume of gold and held his sword, he looked entirely different."

Franklin has explained to his family that the toreador



Brooklyn born and bred Sidney Franklin. . . . "He garbed himself in gold for the edification of his family."

and the matador are practically the same thing. There is really no toreador.

"People in this country have the idea that bull fighters use the red cape because red enrages the bull more quickly," he says. "This is not the case. A bull will charge at any object that is moving whether it is red or white. That's why we matadors keep the cape constantly waving. We know from our knowledge of bulls that they will go after the cape and not the man. The red color is used to attract the crowds in the stands."

"IN SPAIN the matadors use capes of lavender and white," Franklin says. "Bulls will not charge at men so long as there is a moving object in sight. That is, of course, bulls that are bred for the profession."

Joselito, the greatest bull fighter in Spain, lost his life under unusual circumstances. He was invited to test a new type of bull in Valencia which a breeder thought would be ideal for the ring. Instead of charging the cape, however, the bull went after Joselito and killed him."

Franklin does not talk much about his achievements in the bull ring. His family confidante is his sister, Helen. During odd moments he has told her about many of his experiences and she has described her brother's version of how it feels to come face to face with an enraged bull.

"A bugle signals the final act of a bull fight," she says. "And the audience is then keyed up for the moment in which the animal is to be killed. The cape, which has been hanging from the matador's slender sword, and which has been used to tantalize the bull, is now removed and dropped to the sand."

"The matador takes his stand before the pawing, bellowing beast and stares fixedly into its eye. Some say this has a hypnotic influence."

Then the matador raises his sword slowly, deliberately. Some people think that the bull is killed by striking it anywhere on the head. This is not true.

"The sword is pointed not at the animal's head but slightly above it. There is a vital spot directly behind the horns—an unmarked spot which the sword must pierce. It is a tiny crutch formed by the bones of the shoulder. Within that aperture the blade must go, unimpeded, to the hilt. Anywhere else and the bull fighter will find himself in trouble. The bull will not die but in a plunging rage attack the man."

"The blade thrust must be sure. The mark must be found in a split second, otherwise the matador's life is as good as doomed. If the blade is sure, it sinks to the hilt. Proof that it has reached the vital spot is seen when the bull sinks to the ground with glazed eyes and that's the end of the battle."

Franklin has fought bulls before the king and queen of Spain and members of the nobility. He has fought in Mexico before high state officials and in various parts of South America, including Panama, Venezuela, Colombia and Peru. A year ago he made a tour of these Latin countries and was well received everywhere.

He is now in Spain and this season hopes to emulate the achievements of such great swordsmen as Joselito, Belmonte, Bombita, Guerrita and La Garteria—all names to be conjured with in the arena of blood and sand.

All Spain is awaiting his early engagements with the greatest interest. American tourists are a common sight in the land of the bright shawl, but an American bull fighter—well, he's a curiosity.