

= Tom Johnson ( bareknuckle boxer ) =

Tom Johnson ( born Tom Jackling ; c . 1750 ? 21 January 1797 ) was a bare @-@ knuckle fighter who was referred to as the Champion of England between 1784 and 1791 . His involvement in pugilistic prizefighting is generally seen to have coincided with a renewed interest in the sport . Although a strong man , his success was largely attributed to his technical abilities and his calm , analytical approach to despatching his opponents . But Johnson was less prudent outside the ring ; he was a gambler and considered by many of his acquaintances to be an easy mark . He is thought to have earned more money from the sport than any other fighter until nearly a century later , but much of it was squandered .

Johnson 's first fight probably took place in June 1783 against Jack Jarvis , after he had unintentionally slighted the wagon driver and professional fighter . Jarvis challenged Johnson to fight him as a matter of honour , and was comprehensively beaten in the resulting match . Johnson 's success encouraged him to take up the sport professionally . By June 1784 he had declared himself to be the champion , although whether of England or the world is uncertain .

In the later years of his fight career , and for some time after it ended , he acted as a second for other prominent fighters and ran a public house . His dissipation outside the ring appears to have resulted in his decision to leave England for Ireland , where he continued to tutor other boxers but eventually resorted to gambling to earn a living . He died a broken man , both physically and financially .

Johnson was inducted into the Pioneer category of the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1995 .

= = Life before boxing = =

Tom Johnson was born in Derby , England in about 1750 , although at least one early historian of boxing , Pierce Egan , states that Johnson was born in Yorkshire . His birth name was Thomas Jackling , but he used the name Tom Johnson throughout his fight career .

Johnson moved to London at a young age and spent the next twenty years or so working as a corn porter , loading and unloading sacks of corn from a wharf near to Old Swan Stairs , ( Upper ) Thames Street .

His selflessness and strength were exemplified during this period by the assistance that he gave to a fellow worker who had become ill . Johnson would carry two sacks of corn on each journey between the wharf and the grain warehouse , rather than the usual single sack , up an incline so steep that it was known as Labour @-@ in @-@ vain @-@ hill . He gave the extra money he earned to the family of the sick man until he was able to return work .

= = Background to 18th @-@ century prizefighting = =

Prizefighting in early 18th @-@ century England took many forms rather than just pugilism , which was referred to by noted swordsman and then boxing champion James Figg as " the noble science of defence " . But by the middle of the century the term was generally used to denote boxing fights only . The appeal of prizefighting at that time has been compared to that of duelling ; historian Adrian Harvey says that :

Patriotic writers often extolled the manly sports of the British , claiming that they reflected a courageous , robust , individualism in which the nation could take pride . Pugilism was regarded as humane and fair and its practice was presented in chivalrous terms . It was also a symbol of national courage , embodying the worth which Englishmen placed upon their own individual honour . The French , it was argued , did not like pugilism because they were not a free people and relied on the authorities to resolve their disputes . By contrast , the British dealt with their own problems in a straightforward manner , according to established rules of fair play .

From a legal standpoint prizefights ran the risk of being classified as disorderly assemblies , but in practice the authorities were mainly concerned about the number of criminals congregating there . Historian Bohun Lynch has been quoted as saying that pickpocketing was rife , and that fights

between the various supporters were common . However , the patronage of the aristocracy and the wealthy ensured that any legal scrutiny was generally benign , in particular because fights could take place on private estates . This patronage also explains why London was the centre for the sport ; people of wealth tended to congregate in the city during the winter months and in the summer dispersed to their country estates . From 1786 , just as Johnson was rising to prominence , there was increased support for the sport because of the interest shown in it by the Prince of Wales ( later King George IV ) and his brothers , the future King William IV and Duke of Kent . This renewed interest followed a period of malaise which had in large part been due to corruption in the form of " fixing " the fights .

Jack Broughton , a celebrated boxing champion ( and another who was also a swordsman ) , had gone some way to defining the rules of prizefighting in 1743 , based on earlier work by Figg , but by Johnson 's time the rules were still interpreted very loosely . The style of fighting was also very different from modern boxing ; the contestants stood facing each other squarely with their feet in line and their fists raised level in front of them , rather than the present @-@ day stance of generally having one foot slightly in front of the other and one fist leading . Brute strength was the primary factor for success and knock @-@ downs were frequent , a consequence of the instability inherent in the positioning of the fighters ' feet . Rounds were not timed but instead lasted until a man was knocked down , with fighters permitted to wrestle each other to the ground . Moving around the ring , known as shifting , was deprecated and sometimes explicitly prohibited by the rules for a fight ; going to ground without being hit could lead to claims that the man still standing had won . The fighters usually each provided an umpire of their choice , and there might also be a third , independent umpire present , to adjudicate between them .

= = Career as a fighter = =

= = = Early period = = =

Johnson probably began fighting in June 1783 , at the age of thirty @-@ three , although Brailsford suggests it was 1781 or slightly earlier . Johnson had unintentionally slighted a carman ( horse @-@ drawn wagon driver ) and fighter called Jack Jarvis , who then called for Johnson to fight him as a matter of honour . Johnson comprehensively battered the experienced Jarvis at Lock 's Fields , and his name came to the attention of professional fighters . At that time Johnson had no intention of earning a living from the sport , but he became so goaded by a professional known as The Croydon Drover that a fight was arranged for March 1784 , at Kennington Common . Johnson beat the Drover to a pulp in 27 minutes and decided to become a professional .

The success against the Drover was followed by a victory against the ageing professional Stephen " Death " Oliver in June . The fight , which took place at Blackheath in front of thousands of people , was over in a time stated as being either 18 or 35 minutes . Johnson subsequently declared himself to be the champion and challenged all @-@ comers . Most contemporary and near @-@ contemporary accounts , such as those of Egan , regard this title of champion to mean Champion of England but Barrett O 'Hara , writing in 1909 , listed Johnson as the fourteenth World Heavyweight Champion . At the time of Johnson 's victory , the holder of title of champion was disputed . The previous holder , Duggan Fearn , had disappeared and Harry Sellers , the man Fearn had beaten to win the title in a fight that lasted 90 seconds and was alleged to have been fixed , had died .

Johnson did not fight again until he beat Bill Love , a butcher , at Barnet on 11 or 13 January 1786 in a contest that lasted five minutes and offered a prize of 50 guineas . He then beat Jack Towers the following month at the same place .

The final fight of Johnson 's early period , during which the stake money was relatively low , was his comprehensive win over a ponderous fighter called Fry for a prize of 50 guineas at Kingston . The fight , which lasted less than 30 minutes , ended with Fry badly beaten up and Johnson with barely a scratch on him . This fight did not attract many supporters of the sport ; it took place on 6 June 1786 and was therefore during the period when the wealthy were away from London .

== Consolidation ==

Johnson had developed to be an exceptional fighter , and a rarity in his day because he used his brain as well as his strength . A barrel chested man , he weighed around 196 pounds ( 89 kg ) and his height was variously stated in the range of 5 ' 8 " ( 1 @. 73 m ) to 5 ' 10 " ( 1 @. 78 m ) . He was known for his coolness under pressure and he took time to analyse his opponent 's strengths , weaknesses and technique . He did not retreat from the fight but avoided risk and was careful not to expose himself too much to attack , although his guard was described as " inelegant " by Egan . That writer also explained that he " worked round his antagonist in a way peculiar to himself , that so puzzled his adversary to find out his intent , that he was frequently thrown off his guard , by which manoeuvring Johnson often gained the most important advantages . " All of this meant that his fights were not usually of short duration ; he made certain of the outcome rather than risking anything .

Having exhausted challengers in London , he took on Bristolian professional Bill Warr for 200 guineas at Oakhampton , Berkshire on 18 January 1787 , although the manner of his victory on this occasion was " scarcely worthy of being called a fight " , according to The Sportsman 's Magazine . Warr had to resort to shifting and falling to the ground in order to stay in the contest , and as both tactics were regarded as underhand he attracted the ire of the crowd . He survived for almost 90 minutes until a choice blow from Johnson caused Warr to run from the ring , despite the protestations of his second .

A hiatus in Johnson 's boxing career followed , with no challengers coming forward until the Irish champion Michael Ryan took an interest . The fight at Wraysbury , then in Buckinghamshire , on either 18 or 19 December 1787 saw Richard Humphries ( " The Gentleman Boxer " ) acting as Johnson 's second and Daniel Mendoza as his bottle @-@ holder . Ryan was the favourite to win before the fight , and he had Johnson reeling against the rails of the ring with a blow to the head after almost 20 minutes had elapsed . Humphries ' second stepped in to prevent a second strike and this enraged the crowd because they believed Ryan could continue hitting until Johnson fell to the ground . They encouraged Ryan to declare himself victor as a consequence of this foul but he refused , as he wanted to win by means other than a technicality . He allowed Johnson to recover and then , in the space of the next ten minutes , lost the bout .

== Financial security ==

The nature of the fight with Ryan led to a much anticipated re @-@ match at Cassiobury Park , Hertfordshire on 11 February 1789 . At stake was prize money of 600 guineas , as well as Johnson 's title of champion . Humphries again acted as Johnson 's second and a man called Jackson was his bottle @-@ holder . The fight consisted of one round of mutually displayed skill , during which Johnson was felled , and thereafter was brutal passion . Egan described it as

The set @-@ to was one of the finest ever witnessed and much science was displayed ; the parries and feints eliciting general admiration ... [ The second round ] was terrible beyond description ? science seemed forgotten ? and they appeared like two blacksmiths at an anvil , when Ryan received a knock @-@ down blow . The battle was well sustained on both sides for some time ; but Ryan 's passion getting the better of him , he began to lose ground . Ryan 's head and eyes made a dreadful appearance and Johnson was severely punished .

It was over in 33 minutes , when Ryan gave up the fight . One spectator , a Mr Hollingsworth , who was a corn factor and had at one time employed Johnson , was so impressed and pleased with how much he had made from betting on Johnson that he settled a £ 20 per annum gift for life on the fighter .

A proposed bout later in the same year against Ben Bryan ( sometimes known as Ben Brian , Ben Brain or Ben Bryant ) came to nothing . Bryan had been a collier in Kingswood , Bristol before moving to London to fight . He was seen as a strong potential challenger , having already won two fights in the provinces and then won against John Boone ( known as " The Fighting Grenadier " ) , a

man called Corbally , and Tom Tring . The prize money was set at £ 1000 , but Bryan became ill and had to withdraw , forfeiting his staked deposit of £ 100 .

Later in 1789 fighters from the Birmingham area issued a series of challenges to opponents based around London , intended to demonstrate the level of organisation and confidence among the Birmingham boxers and their supporters . Three of the challenges were accepted , including that from Isaac Perrins to Tom Johnson . Perrins , who has been described as " the knock @-@ kneed hammerman from Soho " , had already issued a general challenge , offering to fight any man in England for a prize of 500 guineas , having beaten all challengers in the counties around Birmingham .

The Perrins ? Johnson fight took place at Banbury on 22 October 1789 , billed as a battle between Birmingham and London as well as for the English Championship . The venue had been intended to be Newmarket during a race meeting but permission could not be obtained . The two men were about the same age but physically very different . Perrins stood 6 ' 2 " ( 1 @.@ 88 m ) tall and weighed 238 pounds ( 108 kg ) . It was claimed that he had lifted 896 pounds ( 406 kg ) of iron with ease , and he was " universally allowed to possess much skill and excellent bottom " . That is , it was acknowledged that he was skillful and courageous . The physical mismatch was later described as a fight between Hercules , in the form of Perrins , and a boy .

The first five minutes of competition saw neither man strike a blow and then when Perrins tried to make contact Johnson dodged and felled Perrins in return . Although Perrins recovered to hold the upper hand in the first few rounds , Johnson then began to dance around the ring , forcing Perrins to follow in order to make a fight of it . This was the first time in his career that Johnson had found it necessary to resort to this tactic of shifting . It confused Perrins because of it being contrary to the custom at the time , but the rules for this particular fight did not prevent it . Nor did they specify what should happen if a contestant fell to the ground , which is what Johnson did in order to avoid being hit ? this action was thought by the spectators to be unsporting but was permitted by the two umpires . Before long both fighters showed signs of their opponent 's attacks , with first Perrins and then Johnson suffering cut eyes and then further damage to their faces . By the fight 's end Perrins ' head " had scarcely the traces left of a human being " , according to Egan in his history of boxing . The contest lasted 62 rounds , which took a total of 75 minutes to complete , until Perrins became totally exhausted . Tony Gee has said that

Perrins had overwhelming physical advantages but , owing to his naïvety , no clause was inserted in the articles of agreement to prevent " shifting " ... Moreover , Perrins was inexperienced in the subterfuges of the sport and found himself outwitted by his artful adversary .

Perrins ' supporters had gambled heavily on him because of his reputation and his advantage in size . In the event it was a major supporter of Johnson , a Thomas Bullock , who gained ; he won £ 20 @.@ 000 ( equivalent to £ 220 @.@ 000 as of 2010 ) from his bets in favour of Johnson and gifted the victor £ 1 @.@ 000 .

The event was recorded in The Gentleman 's Magazine of that month :

... a great boxing match took place ... between two bruisers , Perrins and Johnson : for which a turf stage had been erected 5 foot 6 inches high , and about 40 feet square . The combatants set @-@ to at one in the afternoon ; and , after sixty @-@ two rounds of fair and hard fighting , victory was declared in favour of Johnson , exactly at fifteen minutes after two . The number of persons of family and fortune , who interested themselves in this brutal conquest , is astonishing : many of whom , it is proper to add , paid dearly for their diversion .

The contestants received 250 guineas each , with Johnson also receiving two @-@ thirds of the entrance takings ( after costs ) and Perrins receiving the other third . The net takings were £ 800 , and the number of spectators was variously stated as being 3 @.@ 000 or 5 @.@ 000 . Johnson called on Perrins and left him a guinea to buy himself a drink before leaving Banbury . The fight had proved to be " one of the hardest , cleanest and most brilliant encounters that ever took place " . As O 'Hara put it , " The stevedore at 33 has become at 39 the Croesus of the ring . "

Copper medals were struck to commemorate each of the contestants . The obverse side of these contained a picture of the respective fighter ; the reverse had the Latin inscription *Bella ! Horrida bella !* ( a quotation from Virgil which can be translated as " wars , horrible wars " ) and the words "

Strength and magnanimity " in the case of Perrins , and " Science and intrepidity " for that of Johnson . Chaloner has speculated that these may have been produced by Perrins ' employers , Boulton and Watt , and says that they bear similarities with the work of a French die maker called Ponthon who was supplying the firm with industrial items from at least 1791 . The National Portrait Gallery holds two pictures of the Banbury fight , one an etching published by George Smeeton in 1812 , and the other by Joseph Grozer in 1789 .

= = = Last fight = = =

Ben Bryan now challenged Johnson once more . He had recovered from his previous illness and won a fight at Banbury against Jacombs , another of the Birmingham challengers , on the day after Johnson 's victory against Perrins . Subsequently Bryan had drawn a 180 @-@ round contest with Bill Hooper , also known as " The Tinman " , regarding which The Sportsman 's Magazine claimed " A more ridiculous match never took place in the annals of pugilism . "

The Duke of Hamilton supplied Bryan 's stake to fight Johnson in a contest for a prize of 500 guineas held at Wrotham , Kent . Although it is thought that he held property worth £ 5 @,@ 000 by the end of the 1780s , and had earned the equivalent of US \$ 125 @,@ 000 in 1789 alone ( including money earned from betting on himself ) , Johnson had to rely on friends to provide his stake because he had spent all of his money . He was a gambling man and an " easy mark " , attracting people who gladly took his money from him . Brailsford has commented that this dissipation in his personal life was at odds with his cautious , calculated approach when in the prize ring .

Johnson was a clear favourite to win the match , which took place on 17 January 1791 and attracted even more spectators than had been present for the Perrins fight . He had Joe Ward as his second and Mendoza as his bottle holder , with those roles for Bryan being filled by Warr and Humphries . The brutality of the initial fighting was shared by both men . Johnson 's nerve failed him , as did his command of the techniques that had served him well . O 'Hara describes that he fought " like a wild man " and , throwing caution to the wind , broke a metacarpal in his middle finger after the momentum created by throwing a wild punch caused him to crash into the ring rail and then to the floor . This was the turning point , and O 'Hara describes the situation as , " Frightfully beaten , his fists useless , his eyes closed , bathed in blood , and without the chance even of turning the tide with a lucky punch , he refuses to surrender . " He had to resort to shifting once more and eventually to wrestling with the hair of Bryan , which generated much disapprobation among the crowd . Eventually Bryan forced Johnson to the floor and beat him unconscious . Johnson had lost the fight , and his status as champion , in 21 minutes . Egan speculated that Johnson 's change in style , evident from the outset of the fight might have been due to either genuine concern about Bryan 's abilities or from his gambling problems ; either way , " there was a miserable falling off in him altogether ! "

Egan wrote that Johnson was the nearest any boxer had come to matching the skill of Jack Broughton . He was thought to have earned more money during his reign as champion than any other fighter until John L. Sullivan almost a century later . Jack Anderson , a modern historian of the sport , has summarised the early boxing writers as agreeing the period of Johnson 's reign as champion " rescued the declining sport and heralded the beginning of a golden age " .

= = Life after boxing = =

Johnson acted as second to various fighters around the period of his rise and fall . He performed this duty for Tom Tyne ( " The Tailor " ) at Croydon on 1 July 1788 and at Horton Moor on 24 March 1790 , having previously done so for a fighter called Savage who had taken on Jack Doyle at Stepney Fields on 22 November 1787 . He also acted twice for Humphries , in his fights against Mendoza at Odiham on 9 January 1788 , when Mendoza sprained his ankle on the slippery surface , and at Stilton on 9 May 1789 . There was much controversy at the latter , with O 'Hara reporting that this caused Mendoza 's second , a Captain Brown , to call Johnson a blackguard ; Johnson

responded by threatening " to punch Brown into Eternity . " Johnson switched fighters and seconded Mendoza against Humphries at Doncaster on 29 September 1790 , and again in a contest against Warr near Croydon in May 1792 . Similarly , he acted as second for Hooper when he fought George Maddox at Sydenham Common on 10 February 1794 and for Tom " Paddington " Jones at Blackheath on 10 May 1794 . Other occasions when he acted as second include for John Jackson ( near to Croydon , 9 June 1788 ; and against Mendoza at Hornchurch on 15 April 1795 ) , and Joe Ward ( at Hyde Park , date unknown ) .

After his defeat by Bryan he bought and ran a public house , The Grapes , in Duke Street , Lincoln 's Inn Fields , London . Retired prizefighters at that time often received the proceeds of a financial collection from their supporters to enable them to buy a licence to operate such premises : " today 's fighter was merely tomorrow 's publican in waiting " . In a 1901 review of sporting prints titled The old and new pugilism , which lamented the passing of the style and the discipline of prize @-@ fighting , " the goal of the successful pugilist was a sporting public house ... they were generally in side or back streets , where the house did not command a transient trade . Most of these sporting " pubs " had a large room at the back or upstairs , which was open one night a week ( preferably Saturday ) , for public sparring , which was always conducted by a pugilist of some note . "

The Grapes soon became known as a haunt of gamblers and criminals , which probably lost Johnson his licence to operate the premises . Subsequently he sought wagers at horse race meetings and cockpits , refusing to pay if he lost and instead challenging the victor to a fight . Johnson moved to Copper Alley , Dublin , but had to leave after magistrates determined that his premises were " not proving so consonant to the principles of propriety , as was wished " . He then went to Cork , where he tried to earn a living by teaching boxing . Finding that unrewarding he turned once again to gambling , and according to Dennis Brailsford " His deterioration was rapid . Both his health and his spirit were broken " . He died in Cork on 21 January 1797 , aged 47 .

Johnson tutored George Ingleston ( The Brewer ) and was at least a supporter of Jones , on whom he once bet £ 100 to win a fight . He also taught a man called Simpson , who went on to fight Jones in 1804 .

Johnson 's brother , Bill Jackling , also did some boxing . He lost to Elias Spray some time prior to Spray 's 1805 fight against Joseph Bourkes , a perennial challenger for the championship .