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*Hull Daily Mail*

### **Book of the Month**

*Lonsdale Sports*

Myler's ability to dig deep, gather plenty of background information, coupled with his easy-flowing style of writing, paints a fascinating scene building up to the contests. We urge you to add this book to your collection.

*Boxing News*

Myler doesn't just deal with what happened inside the ropes but also provides a balanced overview of the controversies, personalities and historical contexts that make these fights worth reading about.

*Ring*

### **Boxing's Hall of Shame**

Boxing scribe Thomas Myler shares with the reader a ringside seat for the sport's most controversial fights. It's an engaging read, one that feeds our fascination with the darker side of the sport.

*Bert Sugar, author and broadcaster*

Well written and thoroughly researched by one of the best boxing writers in these islands, Myler has a keen eye for the story behind the story. A must read for all fight fans.

*Yorkshire Post*

### **Ringside with the Celtic Warriors**

The latest offering from this highly-respected boxing writer is well up to the standard we expect from him.

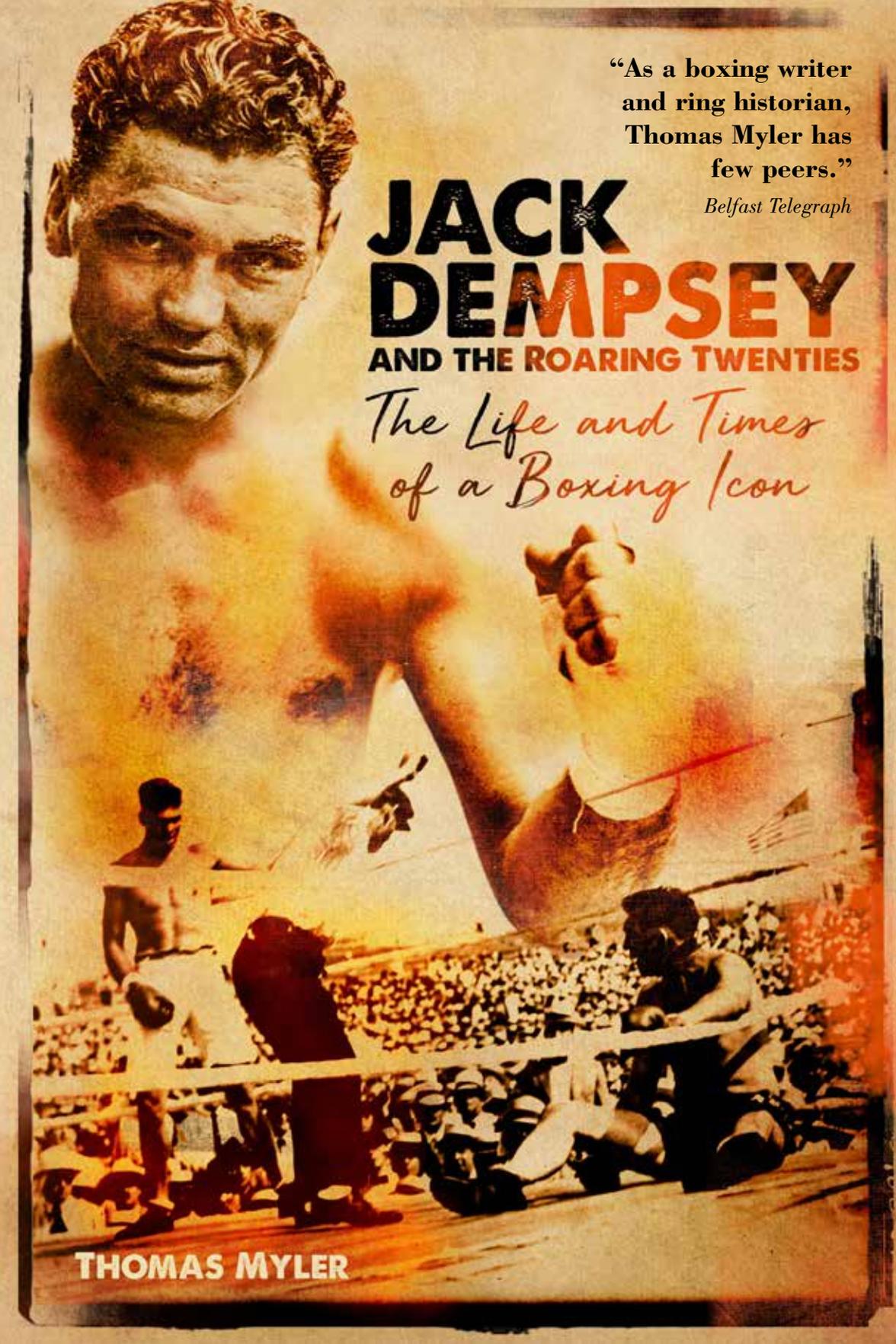
*Boxing News*

Thomas Myler has come up with another gem. His credentials and easy, readable style make this a must book for fight fans.

*The Sun*

As a ring historian, Thomas Myler has few peers.

*Belfast Telegraph*



“As a boxing writer  
and ring historian,  
Thomas Myler has  
few peers.”

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# JACK DEMPSEY

AND THE ROARING TWENTIES

*The Life and Times  
of a Boxing Icon*

THOMAS MYLER

**JACK  
DEMPSEY**  
**AND THE ROARING TWENTIES**

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## Chapter 1

# Go west, young man

MANASSA IN Conejos County, Colorado is a busy town today, surrounded by farms and ranches, with rolling hills to the east and west. A mostly agricultural community, it has a small-town feel with no traffic lights, stop signs or parking restrictions. Approximately half of the residents are of Spanish and Mexican heritage. The rest are mainly descendants of the Mormon pioneers who fled persecution from the south because of their faith.

In 1878, a group of 72 very tired Mormons alighted from the wagon train that ran through the San Luis Valley and founded Manassa, naming it after Manasseh, a son of the Israel Joseph. They felt it was as good a place as any to bed down. After establishing Manassa as a Mormon community, the settler's strong faith helped them survive throughout the years. On its foundation, Manassa's population was 250. In 90 years, it had grown to 642. Today, the town is the largest community in Conejos County, with 991 residents, according to the most recent United States census in 2010.

Dempsey's father Hiram Dempsey was a descendant of Irish immigrants from County Kildare. Hiram, who also had Jewish blood running through his veins, lived in Logan County, West Virginia, widely known as 'feud country' because of the pistol-packing, trouble-shooting Hatfields and McCoys.

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It was said they were so distrustful of each other that they wore their boots and guns in bed, 'and probably slept with one eye open as well,' according to one historian. Whenever a member of either family died, the next in line would assume control, with the slogan always, 'Shoot quick and shoot straight'. At one time Hiram was sheriff of Logan County so he knew how to handle gun-toting troublemakers. Dempsey's paternal grandfather Andrew Dempsey had also been sheriff of Logan County.

Andrew was a blacksmith and ran a busy forge in Burnsville, North Carolina. He was known to the family as 'Big Grandpa Andy,' and with good reason. Standing around 6ft 4in in his stocking feet and weighing 250 lbs, he was all muscle and wielded his blacksmith's hammers as though they were drumsticks. It was said he had the strength of ten men in his big hands. He was the champion fighter and wrestler in the county.

One day a gang of around eight rowdies came from over the hills to make trouble. They barged into his forge, yelling and howling as Andrew was busy on a horseshoe. With two of them going straight for Andrew, he was ready for them. Letting out a war cry, he yelled, 'OK, you rascals. Let's see what you're made of!' Sidestepping one of them, a powerful right sent the other to the stone floor. As the third one tried to come from behind, Andrew saw him and in an instant, a looping left hook sent the assailant backwards, his head banging against the anvil, out to the world.

The rest were too dumfounded for any further attacks. One of them shouted, 'Let's get out of here, boys,' and they ran off. Andrew dragged the three outside and deposited them in a heap. He then returned to his anvil and calmly got back to his work. The troublemakers never set foot in his forge again.

Andrew's son Hiram was tough, too, like his father. He had to be, as did other hard-pressed pioneers. Hiram Dempsey married Celia Smoot in Logan County, nestling in the rugged hills of West

Virginia, in 1868. She was of Irish-Scottish ancestry, with strong traces of Native American stock traced back to the Cherokee tribe. Hiram was a schoolteacher at the time. The money was not great but jobs were hard to find.

At the end of his fourth year of teaching, he'd had enough. He had even thought of escaping from the classroom and searching for another job. In any event, Hiram was a restless individual. He was always on the move, never settling in one place. His Irish forebears were wanderers too, boarding an old, wind-driven sailboat and braving the stormy waters of the Atlantic to land in the New World. Hiram was of the same ilk.

One day Hiram could hardly fail to notice posters stuck up all over town telling of the imminent arrival of a travelling Mormon missionary that was coming all the way from Salt Lake City, Utah. By the time the preacher arrived in town, he had quite an audience waiting for him – a poor audience but a receptive one, Hiram and Celia included.

The preacher started off, 'Friends, there's a new life out west, a new opportunity to start afresh'. Soon, Hiram heard all he wanted to hear. A new life out west, and a Mormon religion. Celia saw things differently at first. She was cautious, but as she leaned forward and listened to each word that flowed out of the preacher's mouth, she became impressed and touched by the fresh concepts of this new faith, and a new life out west. The more she listened, the more she liked what she heard. She was convinced that this faith and new lifestyle was tailor-made for her as well as for Hiram. In time, both would convert to the Mormon faith.

Hiram sold some acres of timberland he had inherited from Andrew and bought horses and a covered wagon. Within a few days, and after a number of tearful goodbyes, Hiram, Celia and their two small children were ready. The wagon was stocked with provisions that included drinking water and books for the long and lonely evenings. But it was not the material things that got

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them out west. It was hope, courage and the pioneering spirit that helped them through the hardships such as heavy rains, dust storms and many breakdowns.

After pressing on for what seemed like an eternity and endless miles, they decided to settle down in the small Colorado town of Manassa. They found the community had a 'good neighbour' policy and anybody who fell down on their luck would not be down for long. If there was something to be done for someone else, then it was done without the asking.

To Hiram and Celia, Manassa seemed a new and promising place to settle down. It was a small tight community where everybody knew everybody else. The settlers built a big Mormon church in the centre of the town, and people from other localities would come to worship, and admire the tall steeple. In Manassa the couple's third and most famous child, William Harrison Dempsey, was born on 24 June 1895. He would be known as Harry. His more familiar name, Jack, would come later.

Hiram got employment on the new railroad but when work was completed in the area, he lost his job. The family moved 175 miles further west, to Uncompahgre, Colorado. Once there, Hiram worked as a rancher but having the wanderlust feeling once again, they moved a further 12 miles to Montrose where a great railroad tunnel was being built. Celia opened a cheap restaurant, the Rio Grande Eating House, for the workers. Young Harry, now 11, spent two years washing dishes and mopping floors.

When the tunnel was completed, the family moved yet again, this time to Utah, first to Provo and then to nearby Lakeview. They stayed in Lakeview for several years before settling down permanently in the Utah capital, Salt Lake City. Young Harry, the future heavyweight champion of the world, had a limited education in the local school but left with good grades. He knew that an education, even a reasonable one given the circumstances, was beneficial in order to make some kind of headway in the world.

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In his teenage years Harry worked any kind of job that was available in order to help the family finances. He found employment in the local beef refinery, emptying railcars and would claim to have been able to unload ten to 15 tons a day. The job required the youngster to be quick on his feet and he developed a habit of working from a crouch, which meant he could shift position quickly. The crouch developed into what he would later claim was his most important weapon in the boxing ring.

When work became slack in the refinery and he was let go, Harry worked as a farm hand. He would attribute much of his fine physique in later years to this outdoor work. From farm hand, he turned to the mines, digging and shovelling coal. By this time, his parents' marriage was beginning to turn sour. Hiram was a womaniser. One day, he told Celia he was leaving the family home. Packing his few belongings in a bag, he said a brief goodbye, and walked out of their lives.

Celia was now the breadwinner, and with two other partners she invested whatever money she had in a new restaurant. It advertised 'good grub and the best beans in town' and was very popular, with customers coming from miles around. Soon the family was involved, with the older children employed in various capacities from waiting on tables to washing up in the kitchen.

Harry, now 17, had also inherited the family's wanderlust. He wanted to see what life was like outside Salt Lake City. Imbued with a desire to see the country, he was confident he would make good. He often thought of becoming a boxer like his older brother Bernie and of course his paternal grandfather Andrew Dempsey.

'Bernie was a good fighter but he had a glass chin so he never really made it into the big time,' the future world heavyweight champion would recall. 'But as I say, he was a good fighter and I followed his career. Yet I knew deep down that if I was going to be a boxer in those early days, I would have to make sure I had all the equipment and no glass chin. Bernie encouraged me, and

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to make sure I had a solid chin to absorb heavy punches, he had me chew the resin-like gum from pine trees. To make sure, too, to toughen my skin, Bernie made me bathe my face three times a day in buckets of stinking beef brine.'

One evening before one of his fights, Bernie was not feeling well and asked Harry to substitute for him. Bernie had always used the name 'Jack' in the ring in memory of a famous Irish fighter billed as Jack Dempsey the Nonpareil, one without equal. He was a former world middleweight champion and came from County Kildare. Harry won his fight on a knockout in the second round. From that moment on, Harry Dempsey was now Jack Dempsey. Bernie never returned to the ring and would encourage his younger brother to pursue a boxing career.

Now that he was a fully fledged boxer, Jack started to do some research on the original Jack Dempsey. Looking through some old copies of the *National Police Gazette* in the local library, he came across an article about the Nonpareil and discovered his name was not Dempsey at all. He was born John Kelly and had arrived in New York as a child with his parents. As a teenager he worked in a Brooklyn factory making barrels before venturing into professional wrestling at the age of 20 and then into boxing as a lightweight a year later.

By a strange coincidence, around that time Kelly changed his name to Dempsey in memory of the Dempsey family he had known back in County Kildare. In doing so, he would create a future link between the old Dempsey brood and the more modern one.

A fast and skilful boxer with power in both hands, he won the American and world middleweight titles against the London-born George Fulljames on a knockout in 22 rounds in New York in 1884. Campaigning all across the United States, he remained undefeated until 1899 when he fought the Canadian, George LaBlanche.

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The Irishman was getting the better of his opponent until the 32nd round when LaBlanche landed the so-called pivot punch, a backhand blow to the head, to win by a knockout. The punch was later declared illegal and the Nonpareil was permitted to retain his title. He lost it in 1891 to Cornwall's Bob Fitzsimmons on a knockout in 13 rounds but continued his career until his retirement in 1895. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in New York in 1992. The Nonpareil died on 2 November 1895, five months after the birth of the modern Jack Dempsey.

\* \* \*

The heavyweight championship of the world and the riches that went with it was a distant, unattainable dream in the mind of the 'new' Jack Dempsey in 1912. Having left the family home to seek a life outside Salt Lake City and make something of himself, hopefully a boxer, he travelled from town to town, usually 'riding the rods,' hanging on to two narrow steel beams beneath the undercarriage of trains. Balancing for miles at great speed, often up to 70 miles an hour, inches above the tracks, unable to sleep in case he lost his grip, it was a dangerous and debilitating way to travel.

'Sometimes it got real cold under the train,' Dempsey wrote in his autobiography. 'You would be hanging on with your eyes shut to avoid the hot blinding cinders and trying to keep warm at the same time. It wasn't easy, especially when exhaustion set in. When that happened, I would tie my hands and feet, using anything from light chains to heavy cotton handkerchiefs, to the train's lower rungs, making sure the knots were tied as strongly as I could make them.'

Though he usually avoided the clutches of the law for his illegal method of travelling, as did many others, on the occasions he was caught, it meant a night in the local jailhouse. If for nothing else, at least the cell provided a bed for the night, even if it was uncomfortable.

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On the banks of the railroad tracks, generally near a fresh water stream, were the ‘hobo jungles’ or ‘hobo camps’. Here, hobos, tramps and those who had fallen on hard times would gather, all bundled up in their layers of old clothing and newspapers, warming themselves and eating whatever food they pooled, over a fire. It seems that as long as you threw a donation into the pot, however small, you were welcome to eat.

Dempsey would find a great comradeship and a strong bond of brotherhood among them. Their home, as in Jack’s case, was the entire countryside. Nobody interfered with anybody else, or in anyone else’s business, as interference and influence were part of the conformist world they were trying to avoid. He would never forget the hoboes who befriended him so many times.

Travelling from town to town, from state to state, Dempsey found work wherever he could, often down the mines, but all the time looking for opportunities to fight for money. ‘Working in the mines – copper mines, silver mines, gold mines – was tough,’ Jack recalled in later years. ‘Working in one particular mine I served as general utility man.

‘I did what nobody else wanted to do. I performed the chores that even the mining veterans dodged. Hauling, lifting, swinging a pick, stooping and raising heavy loads hour after hour, day after day, that was my job. It was work of the dirtiest, grimmest kind, and it was performed many feet underground, wholly removed from sunlight and fresh air.

‘You had to work really hard. The work was tough and dangerous and didn’t have the safety equipment they have today. But I didn’t mind it much, for the work had its compensations. Every bit of manual labour I was performing was building me up more and more in a physical way – and that delighted me because I wanted physical strength when I would get into boxing.’

It was in a copper mine where Dempsey got his first taste of fighting. He had been there for about a week when the leader of

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a gang of bullies thought it a great joke to drop chunks of dirt on his head. He stood it as long as possible as he did not want to cause any trouble. But then things went too far. He asked the fellows to stop but they ignored him. 'Go to hell, kid,' said one, as the others joined in with jeers.

Dempsey lashed out with a right swing that landed on one of the bullies' jaws and he went sprawling, banging his head against the rock wall and out to the world. Another bully rushed Jack but was met with the same response – another swing and down he went. There was never any further trouble after that.

'My reputation as a warrior in the copper mine spread rapidly,' remembered Dempsey. 'Some fellows, who seemed to be familiar with the fight game, saw me in action and predicted a promising future for me in the professional ranks and where I could earn good money. I thanked them for their interest and confidence but I did not think I was ready to get into boxing just yet.

'I would have to get somebody to handle me and look after my interests, somebody I could trust. I did think about it later yet I was a bit sceptical about the whole thing. What if it didn't work out and I'd be back in the mines? Was I tackling a job too difficult? I could not find the answers to those questions right away. I would need more time to think about the whole thing.'

Often stopping off in towns, and running fast from the train to avoid the authorities, Dempsey would stroll into a saloon, bang his fist on the counter and confidently declare, like a previous world heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan, 'I can't sing and I can't dance but I can lick any man in the house with these two fists'. There were few takers. For those who took up his bold challenge, the agreement was the two fighters would go out to the back of the saloon, take off their jackets and shirts and battle it out, with the loser paying for a couple of drinks. Jack rarely had to pay out.

Dempsey could handle himself in fights in saloons and dance halls, and his reputation soon spread that he was not a man to

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tangle with. Of average build but with great strength developed working in the mines, Dempsey found roughnecks respected him.

‘I later worked in gold mines and silver mines and copper mines and in each I had to work really hard’, Dempsey recalled.

As Dempsey travelled from town to town, state to state, he worked at all kinds of jobs. If it was not down the mines, it was in saloons where he would often get into arguments over one thing or another. The next thing there would be a fight, and Jack always came out on top. It made him think more seriously about this boxing lark. Maybe he was better than he thought he was.

Often in saloons, he would befriend the barman, who would then pick a fight with the most disliked man in the community, usually a tough bully. In the perfect scenario, Dempsey would beat his opponent, the hat would be passed around and he would find himself perhaps \$50 richer. It would be enough to live on for a while before moving on to the next town.

There are conflicting accounts as to when Dempsey had his first professional fight. According to the historian Nat Fleischer, it was in a dance hall known as the Moose Club in Montrose, Colorado on 1 August 1915. His opponent was a local fighter named Freddy Woods. Not only was the 20-year-old Dempsey one of the participants but he was the promoter as well, having saved some money to invest in the show.

How it came about was that while ‘riding the rods’ on a fast-moving freight train carrying a consignment of iron, Jack was caught by a brakeman when the train pulled into Montrose. Rather than haul him off to jail, the brakeman issued a warning to stay away from freight trains unless he had the money to pay for the journey.

Undecided whether to stay in Montrose or to move on to the next freight train that came along, despite the brakeman’s reprimand, he decided to stay. On one of the streets he met a young lad who said his name was Freddy Woods. He said that he

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was known locally as the 'Fighting Blacksmith' and had a busy forge in town. Greetings were exchanged before Dempsey regaled Woods with stories of when his family resided in the town before moving to Provo, Utah.

Jack told him he had ambitions to become a boxer. Woods showed a keen interest in Dempsey's words and suggested they could get together and put on a boxing show in town in a few weeks' time when a local fair was being held. 'All we have to do is to get a few lads together, even if they had no experience, match them up and you and I could be top of the bill in a scheduled three-rounder,' he said. 'We could hire out the Moose Club.' Dempsey thought it a very good idea, and said they could make some money out of the show.

They agreed that Dempsey would act as manager and promoter and that after expenses, the profits would be split straight down the middle. Jack went along to the dance hall proprietor and asked if the premises could be hired out for the night. He agreed. Woods contacted the local newspaper editor and an agreement was reached that the show would be given good publicity in the hope of not only attracting local residents but people from nearby towns as well

'When Dempsey went to the hall the next day to see where he could pitch the ring, he found that all he could do was to set it up on the dance floor without any raised platform,' Nat Fleischer remembered. 'He was informed by the proprietor that no stakes could be fastened into the floor but after a bit of persuasion, the proprietor put up four posts to which Dempsey attached the posts. Jack couldn't get the regulation ring ropes so he went to the nearest general merchandise store and purchased some ordinary clothes line. This served the purpose. Instead of ring padding, he used three barrels of sawdust,'

On the night of the show, Dempsey stood at the door as ticket collector. When he had taken in all he could get, he appointed a

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referee and timekeeper and got the preliminary fights under way. When all was ready for the main event, Jack took off his jacket and trousers, hung them on one of the posts, and motioned to Woods that they were ready to start the proceedings. He had the evening's takings in a bag and which he hung on the same ring post.

Throughout the fight, he made sure to keep one eye on the bag and the other on his opponent. The action lasted two and a half rounds, and provided good excitement for the motley gathering. Instead of engaging in a friendly bout, the two fighters tore into each other. 'They fought like wildcats, and terrific blows were struck except when wild swings rent the air,' said Fleischer.

The first round was about even but in the second, Woods took a hammering. A right swing sent him down, and on rising he was groggy before the bell came to his rescue. In the third and final round Woods landed a solid left hook to the body that made Dempsey wince. In retaliation, he rushed at Woods and landed a right swing to the jaw that sent his opponent down and out.

Thinking that he had hurt Woods badly, Jack rushed to his corner, grabbed the water bucket and emptied the entire contents over Freddy's face. This caused Woods to suddenly regain consciousness and when he did, he was full of fight. Getting to the feet, he wanted to start all over again, and Dempsey had a tough time convincing Woods that he had been counted out and the fight was over.

'I grabbed him and told him to calm down but that didn't get me anywhere,' said Dempsey. 'Then I whispered in his ear, "Don't be a fool. It's finished. You and I are partners. We've given them a good fight and we'll have made a little profit. Now let's quit here and divide our money." That seemed to pacify him. We smiled and I walked him to his corner as the crowd roared their approval of a fight and a show with plenty of action.'

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Dempsey claimed in this fight that he practised what he called his new fighting technique, boxing from a low crouch that made him harder to hit. Added to punches already learned by elder brother Bernie, it would be a style Dempsey would develop and perfect when he hit the big time in the years to come.

Jack himself claimed that the Woods fight was his most important one, though not necessarily his first. Nat Fleischer noted in the 1957 edition of the *Ring Record Book* that Dempsey's early record was unavailable but after diligent research, he listed the Woods fight as being Jack's debut. Today, with more data being made available through the internet, notably the invaluable BoxRec website, more is known about Dempsey's beginnings.

BoxRec lists his first fight as being on 18 August 1914 when he outpointed Young Herman over six rounds at the Ramona Athletic Club Arena in Colorado Springs. Herman, too, was making his ring debut. This fight, at middleweight, is also acknowledged as being Dempsey's first by the *Boxing Register*, the official record book published by the International Boxing Hall of Fame in New York. But they list it as a draw over six rounds. It seems you pay your money and take your choice. However, what *is* agreed is the date.

Dempsey's second fight, and his final one in 1914, was against Billy Murphy, a debutante, at the Garrick Theatre, Salt Lake City on 30 November. It was a short appearance. Dempsey saw an opening in the first round, landed a left hook on Murphy's chin and Billy took the full count after just 64 seconds. The promoter Hardy Downing obviously liked what he saw in Jack and booked him for two more appearances which he won, knocking out Jim Johnson inside three minutes on New Year's Day 1915 and finishing off Joe Lyons in the ninth round four weeks later.

Downing billed Dempsey as 'Kid Blackie' and had him back at the Garrick for three more fights, in March and April. They resulted in a knockout win over John Pierson in seven rounds, a

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sixth round victory over Chief Gordon followed by a defeat in a scheduled four-rounder against Jack Downey, an experienced pro with 54 fights behind him.

One of Dempsey's wins was over Kid Hancock on a Hardy Dowling promotion at the Garrick Theatre, a venue that Jack was now familiar with. Sources differ as to the date of the fight but it was a brief appearance for the future champion. Dempsey walked out, fired a left hook to the body and Hancock went down for the full count – all inside 12 seconds.

When he approached Dowling for his \$5 purse, the promoter handed him \$2 and 50 cents. 'What's the big idea?' Jack said. 'We agreed to five bucks.'

'Sorry, kid. That's all you get,' said Dowling. 'You put Hancock away too fast. You didn't give the crowd out there a good fight for their money, and that's the way things are done around here.'

'But all I did was sock him in the body and he went down and out. It's not my fault he can't take it.'

'Tell you what, Dempsey. I'll put you in with Jack Downey next time here at the Garrick in a four-rounder – 21 February to be exact. He's a tough cookie and if you beat him, by a knockout or on points, I'll give you the rest of your purse, as well as the money for this one.'

Dempsey nodded. He knew a lot about Downey. He was the only one who had defeated Jack when they boxed two months earlier. This time it was all over in two rounds when a right bounced off Downey's chin and put him down seconds before the bell. Dowling paid Jack what he was owed and they shook hands.

Besides his defeat against Jack Downey in April, Dempsey's other loss in 12 contests in 1915 was to Johnny Sudenberg, a wily veteran, in Goldfield, Nevada on 31 May. Several sources list this contest as a ten-round draw but Jack insists he lost the decision. The purse was \$100, win lose or draw. He trained in an area

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close to the Northern Bar, which had been owned by a gambler called Tex Rickard, who would figure prominently in Dempsey's later career.

'It was an important fight and I wanted to make a good impression,' remembered Jack. 'I was not expecting an easy fight as Sudenberg had a reputation, but I had knocked out my sparring partners and I felt good. Sudenberg was big, strong and experienced. The match was in a dancehall, and the place was packed with dirty miners, screaming farmers and drunken shifters. You name it. They were all there.

'For three rounds we stood toe to toe trying to kill each other. From the fourth round on, I didn't know who I was. The altitude in Goldfield didn't help either. My lungs felt as though they were on fire. I looked at Sudenberg and he wasn't faring much better either. My legs were like putty every time I sat in my corner. I was relieved when it was over, even though Sudenberg got the decision.'

When Dempsey went looking for his purse, he discovered to his dismay that the promoter was not at the fight at all, and had spent all the takings in an all-night gambling game before leaving town. Luckily, another promoter at the fight suggested to Jack that he would arrange a return fight in Ely, a copper mining town in Nevada, on 11 June. The venue would be the Bijo Hall for a \$150 purse. Jack accepted.

This time there was a much different result, and a happier financial conclusion. Coming out of a clinch in the opening round, Dempsey drove his opponent back and landed a hard right to the jaw that sent Sudenberg down. He was floored four more times in the round before taking the full count in the second session.

Dempsey was hoping for another impressive win when he touched gloves with Andy Molloy at the Moose Hall, Montrose in Colorado in a scheduled four-rounder on 23 October. Molloy was a rugged veteran with a strong chin. The match was held

during the week of the annual Colorado-New Mexico State Fair and a good crowd turned out.

Molloy started fast and kept out of the way of Jack's rushes and heavy punches by using an effective left jab in the first two rounds. He even bloodied Jack's nose with a heavy right. Coming from his corner in the third round with determination written all over his face, Dempsey rushed at his opponent and before Molloy had a chance to sidestep or use a counter punch, Jack's right glove landed on Andy's chin and sent him down for the full count.

When Dempsey visited Molloy in the dressing room, the loser said, 'What a sock! That right hand of yours is just dynamite.' When Jack commiserated with him, the two antagonists got together in a local bar where Molloy learned of Dempsey's lifestyle. 'Y'know, you're too good to be riding the rods or working down the mines or doing odd jobs – even fighting with no direction in mind,' he said. 'You need someone to look after you, a manager. What say we link up and I'll get you the fights that matter?'

Dempsey agreed and Jack's first partnership was formed. Molloy also acted as his trainer, showing him the rudiments of the sport and how to jab and move. He also taught Jack the importance of employing his entire body in the ring by using his legs properly to get the right balance.

'All Dempsey wanted to do was to get in there and knock his man out as quickly as possible, without any thought of defence or setting up an opponent,' recalled Molloy. 'Boxing is an art, to be studied and learned. I must say that Jack improved under my tuition, although he was still basically a fighter and a natural one.'

Molloy also took Dempsey's older brother Bernie under his management. Bernie had an inconsistent record but still believed he could make the grade as a professional, even though he was nearly 40 years of age. Molloy arranged for Bernie to go in against the veteran George Coplen at the Lyric Opera House, a

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regular venue for boxing shows, in Cripple Creek, Colorado on 19 November.

On the day before the fight, Bernie had second thoughts going ahead with it and persuaded Jack to substitute for him. Coplen had trained for Bernie, who was at least six inches taller than himself. When he saw the smaller Dempsey in the opposite corner, he remarked to his manager, 'I hope I don't kill this little guy. I'm told he's the lighter man by 20-lbs.'

Despite the weight disadvantage, Dempsey, who was essentially a middleweight, was in top form. He dropped Coplen six times in the first round and twice in the second. With the referee about to intervene, Coplen's manager persuaded him to allow another round. Coplen improved in the third when it became a battle of attrition. In the sixth round and well ahead on points, Dempsey had his opponent on the canvas for the ninth time before the referee called it off and declared Jack the winner. Dempsey picked up a purse of \$100 for his efforts.

Still acting as Dempsey's manager, Molloy had an offer from Buck Weaver, a wealthy miner, sportsman and sometime barber. 'Why don't you return to the ring to fight Dempsey and I'll promote it,' suggested Weaver. 'I put on shows at the Gem Theatre in Durango and we'd draw a good crowd.'

The match was set up for 13 December and resulted in a clear points win for Dempsey after ten rounds. Molloy, satisfied he had put up a good fight and was on his feet at the finish, told Dempsey he now wanted to continue his career as a boxer. The two parted amicably. Bernie, who had acted as his brother's second, now took over Jack's management, at least temporarily.

Together they would try to obtain the services of a good manager and arrange meaningful fights against important opponents. New York, the mecca of boxing, was their ultimate target although it would be a while yet before they hit the big city. But when they got there, Dempsey wanted to be a big attraction

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and hopefully get some big fights, as well as recognition from some of the top writers.

At this stage, Jack was still relatively inexperienced in the ways of the fight game but had burning ambition and boundless enthusiasm. Moreover, he had a knockout punch in both hands, an invaluable asset in boxing.

It was in Ely, Nevada that Dempsey met the man who would become his next manager. Bernie agreed that Jack should have a proper pilot. He was Jack Price, a gambler with fight connections. Bernie would stay on as trainer. Price arranged a four-rounder with Harvey Weekly, a black boxer known as the 'Boston Bearcat' at the Armory Theatre in Ogden, Utah. The date was 23 February 1916.

The 'Bearcat' was his own press agent. He would stand outside saloons bragging to one and all that he was 'the greatest black fighter that ever lived.' He claimed there wasn't anybody who could whip him, and he would let the curious feel his muscular arms and washboard stomach as they came staggering out of the bars.

Unquestionably a tough fighter, Weekly claimed he went 20 rounds with the great Sam Langford, with the fight ending in a draw. Langford, known as the 'Boston Tar Baby', was a man very few boxers were willing to meet. Sam always maintained he never got a deserved shot at the world heavyweight title because he was a black man.

He gave Jack Johnson some uncomfortable moments in a 15 rounder before Johnson won the title, and when Jack took the championship from Tommy Burns, he did not want anything to do with Langford. So boxing a draw with Sam Langford was enough evidence to suggest that the 'Bearcat' was a formidable opponent.

When Price asked him to prove he fought a draw with Langford, he pulled out a clipping from his jacket. 'There you are, sir, all in black and white,' said the 'Bearcat'. He reckoned he had around 200 fights. Many boxers of that period did not have

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their fights recorded, and promoters and managers relied on the boxers' own word of mouth for their 'records'. Langford himself was said to have had around 400 contests, though statistics seen by record compilers in later years showed 273 contests.

A big delegation from Salt Lake City, where Dempsey had made several appearances, was among the crowd who came to see his fight with the 'Bearcat'. In the dressing room Price told Jack to make it a quick one. 'This guy has a reputation back east, and he looks a tough one,' he said. 'There are no records available except that he drew with Langford but take no chances. Finish him off before he settles down.' Jack and Bernie nodded in agreement.

Following instructions, Dempsey was quickly out of his corner after the opening bell and shot across a left hook that missed his opponent's chin by inches. Following through with a hard right that shook the 'Bearcat,' another left hook, this time to the body, sent the Boston battler down.

At the count of six, he struggled to his feet and put up his hands. 'That's enough,' he said, his face masked in pain. 'I don't want any more.' The result went into the record books as a stoppage in 90 seconds of the opening round.

Dempsey said in the dressing room, 'I couldn't believe I hit him so hard. I'm naturally delighted with my win and this is going to spur me on to greater things.' In the other dressing room, the 'Bearcat' was forlorn. 'Dempsey caught me unprepared,' he moaned, conveniently forgetting the unwritten law of the fight game to expect the unexpected and to protect oneself at all times. He was sporting enough to pay Dempsey a compliment, and when dressed, went to Jack's quarters. Shaking Dempsey's hand, he said, 'I wish you luck, kid. You've got real power in those hands of yours.'

The quick victory encouraged Dempsey to improve. He decided to fight more often and learn as much as he could about the game. He was out on the road training harder than ever, running six or

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seven miles each morning before sunrise to strengthen his legs and stamina. In the gym, he worked with good sparring partners and practised not only how to place his punches but how to feint and weave. He worked on ducking his head from side to side when moving in, making him harder to hit. It would be a style he perfected throughout his ring career.

Within a week of the 'Bearcat' fight, Dempsey had two more wins by knockouts, both at the local theatre in Price, Utah. He put Cyril Kohen away in four rounds with a powerful left hook to the pit of the stomach, and finished George Christian inside two minutes of round one with a left hook to the side of the head followed by a right to the point of the chin.

The Dempsey rollercoaster rumbled on. At the Bijo Hall in Ely, Nevada on 8 April, Jack faced tough Joe Bonds, who had lost only six of his 38 fights, with eight draws. Bonds had just returned from a successful Australian tour with his manager Jack Kearns, a man who would come to play a significant role in Dempsey's career.

Shortly before he went into the ring against Jack, Bonds had split from Kearns following a disagreement over purse monies. But he was still keeping a close watch on Bonds in the event of settling their differences, and was among the attendance for his clash with Dempsey. It would be the first time Kearns saw the future world heavyweight champion in the ring, although there is no record of the two meeting up at the time.

Bonds was a resolute fighter with a strong chin. He managed to stay upright against some heavy shots from Dempsey, and often boxed his way out of trouble when Jack caught him at close quarters. The fight went the full ten rounds, with Dempsey getting on top in the seventh round and keeping up the pressure until the finish. Jack won the decision but admitted afterwards that Bonds had given him his toughest fight to date.

Two more wins in the Utah area followed, a points victory over Terry Kellar in Ogden on 3 May and a stoppage in three

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rounds against Dan Ketchell in nearby Provo two weeks later. Price managed to get the promoter of his next outing, against Bob York at the Elko Theatre, in Price, just outside Provo, to bill the scheduled six-rounder as being for the Pacific Coast light-heavyweight title. The date was 30 May, Jack's third fight in a month.

Historian Nat Fleischer, then sports editor of the *New York Press*, reported, 'It was a thrilling encounter. Both men fought hard and fast. Both could give and take a good punch and the slam-bang milling had the fans yelling their heads off. Dempsey did most of the forcing but York was a willing mixer, and there were plenty of toe-to-toe exchanges.

'By the end of the third round, both boys were well banged up and would not have made very pretty sights for their mothers to look at. The fourth round opened with a rush. The two were whaling away at each other when Jack suddenly uncorked a smoking right hander that landed flush on York's jaw. The blow lifted York off the canvas, about four inches, and he dropped like a log. His head hit the floor with a thud and he lay there unconscious.

'Bob Davis, the referee, turned white. He stooped over the fallen boxer and tried to open his eyes. The seconds, aided by Dempsey, carried York to his corner where, after considerable effort, he came to. As York recovered, Davis turned to Jack and said, "I thought you had killed him." It was a hefty wallop, and demonstrated the punching power of this new western wonder.'

Dempsey was now the Pacific Coast light-heavyweight champion. It was the first boxing title he had ever won. For some time, Jack was still anxious to display his wares in New York. He had given the idea a lot of thought, and often discussed it with Bernie and Price. 'Going East was exciting,' he recalled. 'The big city and all that, and there were no biggest cities in the world

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bigger than New York if you wanted to make it big in boxing.’ The impressive victory over Bob York convinced him to give it a serious try.

The next day Dempsey asked Price how much money he had.

‘A little over \$100,’ replied Price.

‘That’s what I’ve got too,’ said Jack. ‘Bernie has some money saved as well so let’s pool our resources and get to New York. Let’s make some real money.’

‘New York? Are you crazy?’ said Price. ‘They’ve got some real fighters there. They’d knock your head off.’

‘I’m a real fighter too,’ argued Jack.

Price considered briefly. ‘OK,’ he said finally. ‘But I won’t travel hanging under a train.’

‘You won’t have to,’ said Dempsey. ‘This time we’ll buy tickets at the railroad station. This time we travel in style.’