

JACK JOHNSON

HIS COMING TO IRELAND

CHAT WITH TOM FLANAGAN.

PROSPECTS OF A FIGHT IN THIS COUNTRY.

INTERESTING INTERVIEW.

TALK ABOUT THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

It is always a pleasure to have a talk with Tom Flanagan. He is friendly, courteous, and affable, with a fund and variety of information. On his last visit to Ireland, three years ago, he brought a Canadian-Indian, the best long-distance runner in the world. He has since filled the capacity of trainer to the champion boxer of the world—a black—and has come to Ireland to arrange a fight for Johnson. While speaking to somebody passing by train at Kilmallock Station I missed meeting Tom Flanagan as he came off, but before half an hour had elapsed I had a message from him that he wished to see me. To this I immediately responded, and as I entered the room I was clasped by the hand with that which made the world marvel at the distance it threw the 10lb hammer, and the genial John Flanagan invited me to take a seat beside him. I jocularly declined the invitation lest, I said, in case of a difference he would sling me as he did the hammer. So I sought the vicinity of Tom Flanagan, and after a warm greeting, a general conversation ensued from which Tom and I turned to subjects of public interest. He was sorry, he said, that he had not sent me more news from Reno, but he was so busy. He had seen in the *Weekly Examiner* the photos of Johnson, himself and others, which he had sent me. In compliance with my request he gave a brief account of his early connection with athletics in Canada; how he formed the Irish-Canadian Athletic Club, which is now one of the strongest in Canada. He likewise established the National Sporting Club with a capital of 50,000 dollars, and got a Charter from the Dominion and Ontario Governments which entitled him to hold contests of 100 or 500 rounds; the word "fight" could not be used, neither could it be said that it was to be a tussle to a finish. "As you are aware," he continued, "I next took up Tom Longboat, and I must say that the Olympic Marathon was the only race that Longboat lost on me; and of the 31 with which I was associated with him he won 30."

I remarked—You must have been very much disappointed at his failure in the London race?

Yes, it was the biggest disappointment of my life; he should have won by two miles.

I said—"Those of us who saw him in practice here at Kilmallock, as well as those who read of his achievements, were astonished at his defeat."

To which Tom replied—"No wonder. Take, for instance, his run from Limerick to Kilmallock, a distance of 20 miles, which he covered in 1 hour 57½ minutes."

"And he finished," I said, "as fresh as if he had only covered a quarter of a mile. Could the heat have affected the result at London?"

"Oh, yes; you see Longboat came from a cold climate, whereas the weather was excessively warm on the race day; and you must also remember he is an Indian, and they are a lazy people. Longboat sat down, and when asked to continue said it was too hot, and he would go no further."

"I remember that at Kilmallock I saw Longboat retire when he had only half the distance of his practice covered."

To this Tom Flanagan added the opinion that had he been with Longboat he would probably have won, as he responds to encouragement and counsel which would have a very beneficial effect on him, but he (Tom Flanagan) being on a Press car, only saw Longboat occasionally. There were several reports that Longboat was "doped," that he was handed something, but he was handed nothing.

I remarked that I had been informed that when brought to the Stadium Longboat was in a cramped condition and frothing from the mouth, to which Tom Flanagan replied there was nothing amiss with him when brought to the Stadium. After giving a graphic description of the subsequent race between Longboat and Dorando in which he felt the deepest interest, he remarked that he always believed Longboat to be the best long distance runner in the world. Mr. Flanagan said the largest sum of money Longboat ever got in a race was the night he beat Dorando when he received 3,100 dollars, and the next biggest purse was when he ran Alfred Shrubbs two months later.

Asked as to how he came to be closely in touch with Jack Johnson, Tom Flanagan said his hotel was close to the Sporting headquarters; Johnson used to call; this was long before the fight with Tommy Burns. He (Tom Flanagan) was attracted by his physique, and, not knowing the stranger, approached him and said:—"You are the finest cut of a man I ever saw," and at the same time asked his name, to which he simply replied: "Jack Johnson." They became very friendly, and every time Johnson would play in the town he would come to his (Flanagan's) hotel and spend an evening with him. So finally, before the big fight at Reno Johnson phoned him from New York to take charge of his training camp and he accepted the offer. Continuing, he said—My time with him was 35 days. We first went to San Francisco, where Johnson weighed 233lbs., and we had to get him to fighting weight, 210lbs. He is a man that never abused himself; eats hearty and never smokes; sometimes we got him to 224lbs. and he then went up to 233lbs.; we, however, got him down to 217lbs., and on going to Reno it was easier to get the weight off—owing to the hot climate; his exact fighting weight was 205lbs. The night before the fight Ted Rickard (the referee), Jim Corbett and another came to see me, which I thought was a case of bluff; they said "if the fight went to 45 rounds, and the referee could not give a decision, what do you want to do? Do you want it to go on?" I asked Johnson on the telephone, and he said, "Fight on till some one of us is put away."

Another remarkable thing happened. Jeffries' group wanted to toss for corners, which was never heard of before. What the object was we did not know, so we would not toss until we entered the ring, and when going to toss, Johnson said to Jeffries, "Take any side you want," and Jeffries took the side with the sun to his back. In the result Jeffries was not knocked out; he was exactly in the same condition as when John L. Sullivan fought Corbett. He was exhausted, fell on the ring and could not get up. Jeffries' end of the purse was 115,000 dollars, while that of Johnson was 121,000 dollars. After the fight Jeffries' managers and wife waited on big Tim Sullivan for the money, which he handed over, and after which he went to Johnson's headquarters to give him his portion, but at the time he was going into town. Sullivan came up to him and said—"I have the money here for you," and Johnson replied: "That's all right. You can keep it better than I; I will west you in New York." Continuing, Tom Flanagan said:—"After that I returned to attend to my business and had not seen Johnson for six months, and the only information I got from him was a wire to say that I was booked to leave for the old country on the 9th June. I did not know his plans or anything connected with them so when I got on the boat I asked him if he were going to fight. "Yes," he said, "I'll fight, but I like the Irish people; you go over there and try and get up a decent fight; let there be no wrangling about the purse, but have it at a price that every man, woman and child can see it; have no charges over it. Now, about pulling off that fight, Johnson don't want it till August, and my time is so valuable I fear I can't wait until

then; so I'll make an attempt to get him over before then. If I can I will; if not there will be no fight.

What are the prospects of a fight? As I told you, but I don't think there is a prospect of a big fight in Europe so short after the big event at Reno. In fact Johnson is principally over for a pleasure trip. I have no connection with Johnson outside of a fight, and have nothing to do with his London trip, but if I can pull off a fight I'll stay here; if not I will go back.

Who is the most probable man? Day, of Canada. He is our best man there. We think he is entitled to a battle, but I don't think he has a chance with Johnson, nor has any other man in the world.

What about Sam Langford? Johnson will fight any man in the world, but when it comes to Langford the money must be £2,000 win, lose, or draw, with a side bet of £2,000. Any man in the world can fight Johnson under these conditions. With those men you will have to choose between a great big man and a good small man, and you will see that the advantage is with the former. Langford and Tommy Burns at their best would have made a good fight.

Could you have the fight here in three weeks? Yes; Day is ready. All I have to do is to cable for him.

Will Johnson be satisfied to fight Day? Yes; he will fight any man I suggest, no matter who he will be.

What about Con Kelly? I think it will take two or three more years of Con to come. I think he will be a good man then, but it takes a long time to become a fighter. I never saw Con O'Kelly fight, and you never see a wrestler a fighter, as a rule. Of course, there may be an exception. O'Kelly was handled by one of the cleverest men in the world, Tommy Ryan, who ought to know every trick in the game.

Is there a possibility of getting Johnson to fall in with your plans and come over within three weeks? Yes, there is; but I will know in a couple of days.

In fighting Day, will he want the £2,000 and side bet? No, he is fighting for the amusement of the Irish people, and not for moneys at all.

At that rate you may be able to bring that off in the south? I would as soon Limerick as any place in the world.

Who is the man to approach the nearest to give a clinching to Johnson? There is not a man going who will; they are not big enough—a new man must come. The man who would fight Johnson, if he would ask my advice, he would cut off science, because the more he would know about it the bigger beating Johnson would give him, for Johnson is the cleverest man that ever put up his hands. In the old days they spoke of a tall man having a big reach, but Johnson has the shortest reach for a man of his height; he is 6ft. 1½in., and has only 72in. reach. That shows that when he gets in, there is how he gives his great body blows.

Therefore, your summing up is, that since the defeat of Jeffries there is no white man to wrest the laurels from Johnson? As far as the white race is concerned some new man must come up, and there is no other man. Of course there is Morris—in fact almost every city in America has a "White Hope." We consider this man as a great big joke; he stands 6ft. 3ins, weighs 225lbs.; he is big enough, but we don't think he is anybody; yet, the one great object in view, is to have him lick Johnson.

On the whole, you are hopeful of bringing off a fight in Ireland? That is what brought me here; if I can't pull one off I'll go back entirely disappointed. This will be my last connection with Johnson; I will go back to my business; I am here just as a friend to help him in this fight; we never had a contract; we just travelled as two friends, as his word is his bond as far as I am concerned.

Will he come to Kilmallock? The reply was in the affirmative; he will pay a visit.

In the course of further observations, Tom Flanagan said Johnson kills a man with kindness in the ring. When he gets into a clinch he says to his opponent, "go ahead you are doing fine," and then he will give a return, accompanied by the inquiry "how do you like that?" while he keeps laughing all the time. There is no trick in the wrestling game that he does not know, and when he gets in he smothers his man; his style is entirely new, quite different to Corbett, Sullivan or the others. He meets his antagonist with open hands extended forward, and at once catches him by the arms and finally works him down, and while attention is directed to Johnson's right hand he suddenly operates with the left on the right jaw of the opponent; he always makes his man come to him—you can't hit with effect when a man is going from you—while he does not travel much in the contest as he moves in a small space.

Had Jeffries' supporters the confidence in him that was represented in the Press? The supporters of Jeffries did think he would win. They knew the great fighter he was, and if he could get the weight off they believed no one could beat him. Before the fight he looked marvelously well, as perfect as anybody outside. I do not figure it that Jeffries was a great fighter. He always fought small men as can be seen by their weight, but in Johnson he met a great big clever fighter, and that ended Jeffries' career. By the way, Tom Flanagan remarked—You know that Jeffries is in Europe at present. There was only one man to see him off at New York, whereas another time there would be thousands, and not a word appeared in the Press about him. Contrast that with the reception of Johnson? Tommy Burns is running a store in Canada, and he is getting very fat, and says he will never fight again. John L. Sullivan is the most popular of the fighting men in America, and will pack any house; he and Jake Kilrain are travelling together.

Tom Flanagan is accompanied by Mr. Dessette, manager of the Champion Hockey Team, St. Michael's, Toronto. His father brought the great Indian careman, Goodora, to England. His grandfather was brought up at Trale, where Mr. Dessette proposes to visit, and thence proceed to London, Paris and Germany.