

Jews in Sports

By HASKELL COHEN

THIS IS A STORY OF A SHATTERED DREAM. A TALE OF A BROKEN HEART. It began sixteen years ago and ended the other night in Yankee Stadium.

It was back in 1930 when Johnny Ray, nee Chatzel Pitler, was running a gymnasium in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh. Business was bad as the depression was then at its height. Johnny tried to eke out an existence catering to fighters who were booked in the Smoky City. His gym was made available to incoming fighters and if Johnny went lucky he worked as a second for these fighters. But at best it was a precarious living.

About this time a frail, handsome Irish kid came along and asked Ray to let him box. The kid, a fresh lad, had the face of an angel but the guts of a David. Johnny liked the way he handled his dukes against bigger and tougher boys in the neighborhood. The boy's father came around one day and asked Ray to teach the kid how to box. Johnny adopted the twelve-year-old virtually as his own and trained him in the rudiments of the fight game. Billy Conn was an ambitious lad so far as his fighting went. He learned quickly and acquired a polish far beyond his years.

Ray had been a fine featherweight in his day and had fought the likes of Kilbane and Dundee. He was known as a smart boxer. What is more, he knew how to impart knowledge to others. Soon Billy was master of the gym. Naturally the boy was too young to fight as a pro so he was nursed along and fattened up. Johnny wasn't getting rich, you understand. When he managed to pick up a five spot it was steak and potatoes for Johnny and his boy Billy. Finally Ray decided to match the boy and secured a fight in West Virginia.

It was cake and coffee money to the firm of Ray and Conn and what is more Billy lost his first fight. His conqueror's name has long been forgotten. The fights were small money affairs but Johnny and Billy enjoyed themselves traveling to West Virginia. They would roll home at night with Johnny at the wheel and Billy's curly head fast asleep on Ray's shoulder. Ray used to look at the handsome face in repose and mutter to himself, "Some day this kid is going to be the best fighter in the business, a champ."

Their first break came in 1936. Billy was matched to fight the Pittsburgh idol Fritz Zivic. Ray was against the match but went through with it since it promised big dough to the growing firm. Billy came through a winner. The company was on its way. Next came Solly Krieger in three tough fights, Rankins, Fred Apostoli, Gus Lesnevich, Bob Pastor, and Lee Savold. With it came the light heavy mantle which was quickly vacated. The Irish gid was growing. He had his eye on big game. Yes, he was grooming for the heavy weight bauble.

Mike Jacobs liked the boy. He had guts and could take a punch. It was 1941 and the Louis match was set for June. Billy trained hard, too hard. He came in for the fight at 174½. He had worries on his mind. He was getting married right after the fight. He didn't eat the day of the fight. Yet he went out and boxed the ears off Louis for twelve rounds. Ray's teachings stood him in good stead. Johnny beamed in his corner. The fatal thirteenth came. Billy nailed Louis with a left hook but Joe crossed over the left with a right and Billy was on his way to slumberland.

Five long years went by. Johnny and Billy planned how they were going to lick the champ. Every time Billy had a furlough he talked the coming fight over with Ray. They lived for the day when Louis would again put his title up against the kid. All through the training period Ray insisted Billy was in great shape. He would lick the champ this time.

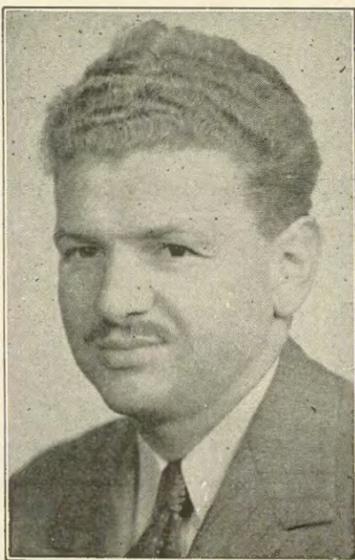
You know the story of the fight. It wasn't even close. Billy was out-classed. Joe had too many guns for the Pittsburgh kid. After the fight when Billy was prepared for the press, Johnny Ray wept silently in a corner mumbling. "He's all through. He just doesn't have it any more."

Johnny was hard to reach after the fight. Billy and others in his entourage showed up at Mike Jacobs' office. But not Johnny. It was said he was drowning his sorrows in the waters that made one forget. The wise guys said Johnny was busted. The nags had nicked him for forty gees and he had gone for a bundle on Billy. Johnny was broke. Money never meant that much to Johnny if his boy Billy didn't share it.

It was true Johnny was broke but not in the pocket. Johnny was nursing a broken heart. After sixteen futile years Johnny saw his buddy wrecked. Conn is through. But so is Johnny Ray. He says he will not go near the ring again. He lived for one thing, a championship for Conn among the heavy boys. At his age he isn't starting again. More's the pity since all fight people assert Ray is the finest teacher in the game today. What they can't realize is that with Conn it was a labor of love, Johnny can't do it again for a total stranger.

National B'nai B'rith Honors Pittsburghers

As a result of extensive participation in war service activities from 1942-1946, I. H. Kantrowitz and Mrs. David Simons have been paid signal honor by the B'nai B'rith National Post-War Service and Americanism Department. Both of these



I. H. Kantrowitz

Pittsburgh members of B'nai B'rith were presented with a brochure in which were reproduced copies of the citations received by B'nai B'rith from the United States War and Navy Departments and excerpts from Congressional Record extolling the contributions of B'nai B'rith to the war effort.

Mrs. David Simons was War Bond Chairman for the Western Pennsylvania Council for almost four years during which time she personally supervised the administrative details pertaining to war bond sales of all denominations and war savings stamps. Mr. Kantrowitz, War Service Chairman of the B'nai B'rith Council of Western Pennsylvania, in addition to planning and guiding the many B'nai B'rith public war bond rallies was the 13-time chairman of the B'nai B'rith Blood Donor Days in Pittsburgh that set the style for other organizations and Red Cross Chapters throughout the nation.

Both of these workers have earned the approbation of the American Red Cross and the United States Treasury Department, culminating in the receipt of a Silver Medal for Distinguished Service and a Red Cross Button of Service of World War I.

In addition to more than \$24,000,000.00 of war bond sales and 3,000 pints of blood in this area, the B'nai B'rith provided many recreation facilities for military hospitals and schools, thousands of games and other forms of diversionary amusements, many rooms completely equipped with furniture and furnishings, and a host of other services. In recognition of its war bond sales, the United States Treasury Department named many pieces of fighting equipment in honor of B'nai B'rith, included in which array were 11 ambulance planes, 25 ambulance trains, a Liberty Ship, a Landing Ship Tank, a Heavy Bomber and lighter flying equipment and other items.

Also recipients of the dual Treasury and Red Cross awards were Herman Fineberg and Miss Kate Schwartz.

Uniontown B'nai B'rith Lodge Plans Summer Dance

The Uniontown B'nai B'rith Lodge No. 471 will hold its summer dance at Gorley's Lake Hotel on July 17 from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m., with Jimmy Brunelli and his orchestra providing the music. Proceeds from the dance will go toward the new Uniontown Jewish Community Home.

Mr. Samuel Kirshman, committee chairman will have the following committee members as his aides: Lester Cohen, Edward Amber, Benedict Berkowitz, Nathan Weinsweig, Howard Abramson, Samuel Weiner, Dr. Edward Kaplan and Sol Krongold.

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