Joe Gans put city on boxing map

A long and discouraging, and probably losing, battle continues in Baltimore, USA, in an attempt to recapture the interest of the town and its sports fans in boxing. But it was not always so.

Elsewhere in these pages is a story by feature writer Brenda Thompson, detailing the untiring efforts of an East Baltimore gym proprietor to keep alive the ambitions of young men inspired by a love for the manly art of self defense.

Maybe these effors are in vain, maybe the ambitions will die for lack of nourishment in the form of competition. But there was a day when Baltimore was introduced to greatness.

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THAT DAY occurred sometime between Nov. 25, 1874, and Aug. 13, 1910. These are the dates carved on a tombstone in Mount Auburn Cemetery. The stone marks the grave of Joe Gans, the man who gained immortality for himself and for his hometown by becoming generally accepted as the greatest fighter who ever lived.

A 16-year-old boy working in a river-front fish market, Gans got started on his spectacular climb in a manner as inauspicious as could be fashioned by the most imaginative rags-to-riches story teller.

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THE YEAR was 1896. Joe was earning little or nothing in a job he didn't like. He heard that the Monumental Theatre was holding nightly "Battle Royals" in conjunction with the customary movie fare, with cash money as prize for the winners.

One night after work, Joe went to the theatre and asked for a chance to enter. He admitted he knew absolutely nothing about boxing, but was undismayed by the thought of climbing into the ring with four husky youngsters in the survival-of-the-fittest combat.

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AT THE END, Gans was the only one of the five starters still on his feet. And for his "success," he earned the munificent sum of $5.

Thereafter, he was one of the "Battle Royal" bums on a regular basis, until Al Herford, owner of a restaurant near Broadway and Canton Avenue, talked Joe into trying boxing as a business.

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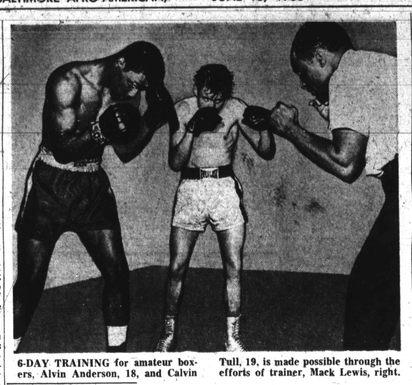
GANS AGREED and he was on his way. Within two years, he had blossomed into one of the most sought-after boxers in the nation. Promoters from New York to Denver to Hot Springs clamored for him, and as a result he met and defeated all the best fighters in the game—from featherweights to middleweights.

He held the lightweight title from 1902, when he stopped champion Frank Erne in one round, until 1908, when—ravaged by tuberculosis and fighting only for what the money would mean to his family—he lost to Battling Nelson in 21 rounds.

Baltimore's excursion to the top of the world in boxing marked her first brush with international fame. Joe Gans had introduced the city to greatness.



6-DAY TRAINING for amateur boxers, Alvin Anderson, 18, and Calvin Tull, 19, is made possible through the efforts of trainer, Mack Lewis, right.

JOE GANS

Boxing at low level here

By BRENDA L. THOMPSON

Anytime between 6 and 8:30 p.m. Monday through Saturdays, a light can be seen over top a grocery store on the corner of Broadway and Eager Sts.

Behind the lighted window are boys and men who one day hope to become professional boxers.

Prospects for encouraging such a venture seem dim, according to Mack Lewis, manager of the Baltimore Athletic Association.

He says, "boxing in Baltimore is at its lowest level."

Reasons for making such a blunt statement range from the decrease in emphasis in the high schools to the lack of community training centers.

"At one time we had boxing in the high schools here in the city", commented Mr. Lewis, "but the schools decided it should be taken out of the curriculum.

"At the same time, we had five or six gyms in the city where the fellows could work out in the evenings after school."

Today the only such place is the B. A. A. where Mr. Lewis has maintained the gym since 1950.

There are 22 fellows coming to the gym which has been there since 1945. Seven of them are professionals and 15 are amateurs. Amateur fighters receive trophies and medals.

MOST OF the fellows learn of the gym by word of mouth, explained Mr. Lewis. "People send them here."

"We accept all here at the mixed club - providing they show the proper aptitude.

"Unlike what many people think of fighters, we train boxers how to live in society. We try to mold good citizens, because people don't believe they can be good."

Mr. Lewis' club sets a good example, in this area where the Baltimore Athletic Association has been the outstanding club for the last 15 years.

One member, Alvin Anderson, 18, a welterweight, won the Washington Golden Gloves Championship.

Calvin Tull, 19, a 118 pounder, lost a recent decision.

The B. A. A. director is especially proud of Robert Loyal who travelled over 1,700 miles boxing for the club.

Mr. Loyal joined the club when he was nine years old. He isn't a professional boxer, but the fellows are proud of him, because he graduated from college and is working for the Federal Government.

MR. LEWIS, who began boxing at Douglass High School and continued for three years in the army, states that lack of sponsors for young boxers is another reason for the sports' decline.

He believes that the men who could afford to help are afraid of taking the financial risk.

"Do you realize," he added, "that in this city of nearly one million people, we don't even have a light portable boxing ring?"

Such a ring, he explains, could be used for showing amateur bouts in different halls throughout the city.

Amateur boxing is the biggest thing right now to Mr. Lewis. "It's the farm system for professional boxing. And it is badly in need of assistance here in Baltimore."

Efforts to revive professional boxing are being made by a promoter, Eli Hanover.

He brings professional fighters to the Steelworkers' Union Hall in Dundalk Ave once a month.

Mack's gym has been the only one in the city for 10 years. Another one is supposed to open soon on North Ave.

Through the efforts of men like Mack Lewis and Eli Hanover, boxing may become another popular sport in Baltimore.

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The Baltimore U. S. Navy training center is located next to Fort McHenry on a 200-foot piece of shoreline and a 3-acre lot. Here 1,400 reservists associated with 25 different Navy units maintains a state of readiness against the day Uncle Sam should declare a state of emergency. Fort McHenry, noted for the Star Spangled Banner was in operation in 1776.

Amateur sports program monument to C. C. Jackson

There can be little doubt that C. C. Jackson Jr., recently retired after 37 years of recreation work, had as much to do with the progress of amateur sports in Baltimore as any single individual.

Mr. Jackson today beams over the numerous achievements of colored athletes in all areas, but looks back with a haunting memory of the many obstacles that had to be overcome.

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C C ARRIVED in the city in 1929, summoned by offer of a job as a recreation worker. He was the first colored person to serve in this capacity on a full - time basis.

"It was a long, tedious, slow road out of the recreational woods," recalls Mr. Jackson, "and it is amazing that the city has been able to develop so many fine young athletes.

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"ONE OF the first men I encountered was the late Bernard Webb. He held title as supervisor of physical education in the public schools. And although he was compelled to move around like a country preacher, Mr. Webb succeeded in laying the groundwork for a successful program.

"He joined me during the summer months when the schools were closed, and together we tackled the multiple problems of inadequate areas and poor facilities.

"Aside from the fact that racial restrictions limited the space available," Mr. Jackson declares, "our youngsters could compete only in the Municipal Games on Defender's Day at Carroll Park."

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THESE GAMES provided competition for elementary-age boys in soccer, softball, basketball and track.

"As it turned out," C C recalls, "they proved the springboard from which several outstanding athletic careers were launched.

"Embra Bowie, now on the Morgan College faculty, was one of these youngsters who later were identified as fine talents. Others were Al Cottman, Ducky Ross, Edgar Contee, the Pullen brothers and the Shepherd boys.

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"IN DUE time, Mr. Jackson continues, "the colored population spread into such communities as Mt. Winans, Wilson Park, Pimlico and Waverly. And pressure started building up for an expanded recreation program to reach these areas.

"That's when the department decided to hire a group of part - time workers to help me.

"It was comprised of Elmer Burgess, former Dunbar High athletic director; William (Mack) Payne, of Douglass High; the late Ike Wright, Louis Snowden and Tom Jones.

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"ALSO DOING a big service at this time were Dennis Mello, Johnny Wedgion and Solo Gibbs."

Mello, according to C C, "coached and managed the Marylanders, a fine club of youngsters in East Baltimore.

"Wedgion developed a commendable sports program in Fairfield, an area near Curtis Bay. And Gibbs organized and developed an all - sports aggregation called the Horsemen.

"The Rev. Mr. Garnet of Morningstar Baptist, was instrumental in a church program that was instituted to help us. Grace AME also sponsored a basketball team that served as an inspiration to the youngsters who weren't involved in an organized school or college activity.

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"ALONG ABOUT then PS 122 was built and the overall recreation effort was given a big boost.

"This was the period that spawned a number of fine performers — fellows like the Veney brothers, one of whom went on to stardom at Lincoln University, Ezra Murdock, Bill Lamokins, Powell Sheffey, Chink Wyatt and the Gibson boys, Deuce and Skippy," says Mr. Jackson.

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"BUT WHILE these men were proving invaluable in the recreational program on the sandlot and semi - pro levels, none did more, or possibly as much as the late (Leonard) Duck Gibson. Mr. Gibson died shortly after retirement from the faculty of Douglass, where he had served two decades as coach of everything and athletic director.

"Mr. Gibson was a hard worker, a man of great patience and a dedicated teacher.

"It was because of him that swimming became a part of colored Baltimore's recreational life.

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"WHEN DUCK first undertook the task of organizing a water program, we were limited to one day a week in the Druid Hill pool. And the youngsters who showed up didn't even want to get wet.

"We had to cajole them, scold them, threaten them. It paid off.

"His rewards came later in the championship performances of the Smallwood brothers, Cliff Tarter, Cathy Byrd, Laura Rice Jackson, the Shorter boys and 'the Mail girls,' says Mr. Jackson.

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THESE ATHLETES were among the best of many fine swimmers developed during the checkered life of amateur sports here.

"So tight were the restrictions in this field," C C recalls, "that we had to come up with a novel idea in order to learn where we fitted in the ability charts and how much we had to do to close any gap that existed.

"MR. GIBSON had a youth in his group who was of fair complexion. He was a pretty good swimmer, though not among the best.

"He entered the Municipal meet at Druid Hill, which was then a closed affair as far as colored kids were concerned.

"They accepted him as an 'unattached' entry and he competed in several events. He didn't win any of them, but we were able to use his performance to compare the merits of our kids.

"OF COURSE, it wasn't altogether proper for us to resort to this kind of subterfuge. But no one was hurt and it served a purpose.

"And, after all, we were battling for young colored Baltimore — a fight in which the odds were stacked heavily against us."

BUDDY YOUNG

An all-time halfback with the original Baltimore Colts, Buddy Young earns distinction as "Mr. Football". He's served as radio-TV announcer, public relations assistant for Colts and now assistant to National Football League commissioner Pete Bazetle.

THOMAS STOCKETT, AFRO artist, shows some of his work during the annual arts festival held at Druid Hill Park. Annual event attracted some 40,000 spectators this spring and promises to grow with the years. Artists compete for prizes and offer works for sale.

Amateur rated

(Continued from Page 25)

bar High School where he remained until he retired in 1960. He was replaced by another outstanding sports luminary (basketball in particular) William (Sugar) Cain, who is Dunbar's athletic director today.

Instead of the fierce and exciting competition displayed by teams in the MSA today, Mr. Burgess's coaching era had colored teams competing in the "colored league" — the South Atlantic Scholastic Athletic Association.

Dunbar, Carver, Douglass, Bates in Annapolis, and Armstrong, Dunbar, and Cardozo in Washington were members of the association.

"St. Johns in Annapolis and City College gave us their old equipment. We just couldn't get new suits, balls, shoes and so forth unless the boys bought them themselves. In many cases they did."

Another touch of irony was also remembered by the longtime "molder of character through sports," as Mr. Burgess and his counterparts are often described.

"I wrote the specifications for the Dunbar gym. It is the only gym in the city that has glazed tile walls all the way to the ceiling.

"If the principal had supported me we would have had a swimming pool in Dunbar now. I asked that a pool be constructed in the gym. Dr. William Lemmel (former superintendent of schools) asked me to "put it in writing. I did.

"But the principal said we were asking for too much."

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Mr. Burgess agrees with Mr. Payne that scholastic sports events often became social events where dances were held after the games. There was a reason.

"That was the only way we could raise money to buy equipment. There was a time when the players had to pay their way to Washington when we played teams there."

It was at one such dance, Mr. Burgess remembers, that he was instrumental in the capture of the leader of the dreaded Brimstone Gang which terrorized East Baltimore.

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INEQUITIES WHICH marked the salaries of colored and white teachers also plagued coaches, Mr. Burgess recalled.

"The white coaches were being paid $600 per year but Duck Gibson (late coach of Douglass) and I were paid $50. This was in addition to their regular teacher's salary, which was also unequal.

He taught 29 periods per week, the former athletic director said.

There was a difference in straight coaching salaries — $2,000 for white and $1,200 for colored — Mr. Burgess remembers.

He agrees with Mr. Burge and Captain Mello, who coached amateur teams under the loose supervision of the Recreation Bureau, the situation "was just as bad there as it was in schools."

Despite their being restricted to certain playing fields and compelled to use make-shift equipment, Mr. Burge and the Harlem Bears football team managed to dominate the amateur gridiron.

Captain Mello, unofficially and officially assigned to the East Side Community Committee to combat juvenile delinquency, lead the East Side All-Stars to envied heights in amateur baseball.

Bugle Field or reserved diamonds at Druid Hill and Westport all served as "home" for the Stars while they were battling and beating some of the best sandlot teams of the day.

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IN ADDITION to the Harlem Bears, the East Siders, Lucky Strikes, Spartans, and Mystics made up the circle of competition, Mr. Burge remembers.

Joe Black, the former Brooklyn Dodger who won World Series fame; Lloyd Michner, James Carrington, Charles Michner, local disc jockey Kelson Fisher, Archie Lewis and Paul Hutchinson were among the outstanding sandlot gridiron performers, the postal worker said.

Junior Gilliam, a Dodger institution, also got his start on Baltimore sandlot diamonds, Mr. Burge declares.

Sen. Welcome likes to travel

By ELIZABETH M. OLIVER

Maryland's Senator Verda Welcome has a secret desire that so overwhelms her, she often wishes it were possible to really have a magic wand.

The heretofore unpublished longing has nothing to do with politics but stems from a childhood yearning to travel.

This part of the dream has been satisfied in adulthood.

Since she finished college, she has been abroad many times and has visited all the states with the exception of Alaska.

But the other part of the dream, the part that certainly requires a magic wand, is one that grows stronger and more overpowering as she criss-crosses America, making speeches as Maryland's first colored woman Senator.

The unfulfilled desire is, "I wish all people, especially young people, could take an endless holiday and travel as far and as wide as they want.

"I wish most of all they could explore at leisure the wonders of our own country and linger long enough in every community to get to know their fellowman.

"I wish each one could see the enchantment of the old West, the beauty of the Grand Canyon, a sunset on the Pacific Ocean, the glory of the plains, New York, New England, everywhere."

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UNBURDENED and free to wander like the proverbial hobo who had not a care in the world, Senator Welcome's dream-sponsored travelers she states, would find peace and contentment.

The same rainbow's end all seek, brotherhood, would become a reality, she concludes, "with no conscious effort."

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MRS. WELCOME's wanderlust began as a youngster in her hometown, Lake Lure, in Western North Carolina near Ashville.

John Freeman, her father now 86 years of age, was a truck farmer.

Through him and their mother, the late Mrs. Docia Freeman, their 15 children learned to love the land.

Although poor in earthly things, they were rich otherwise.

Long summer afternoons, with nothing else to do, the naturally curious Freeman children wandered the countryside to watch a small flower opening its petals, a butterfly passing by.

On hot nights, they explored the North Carolina stars from the porch of their home.

As a farmer's children, they knew all about the miracles of planting time and harvest.

During college vacations, Mrs. Welcome says she and her classmates used their savings to take bus trips to New England, the middle West, wherever they had not been before.

She states she kept thinking as they met other smiling, wide-eyed travelers, "People are friendly. They're not all bad."

Friendship and a desire to get to know other people has been found in every single other person Mrs. Welcome has met on travels around the world with her husband, Dr. Henry Welcome.

As a member of various medical organizations, the doctor has had opportunity to accompany the groups on trips to North and South America, all of Europe, Egypt, the Orient and Mexico.

Yet to be visited is Africa where Senator Welcome says she is sure she will want to stay a long, long time.

Saving the best for the last, she reveals she will take the trip when she and Dr. Welcome can remain to explore every nook and corner.

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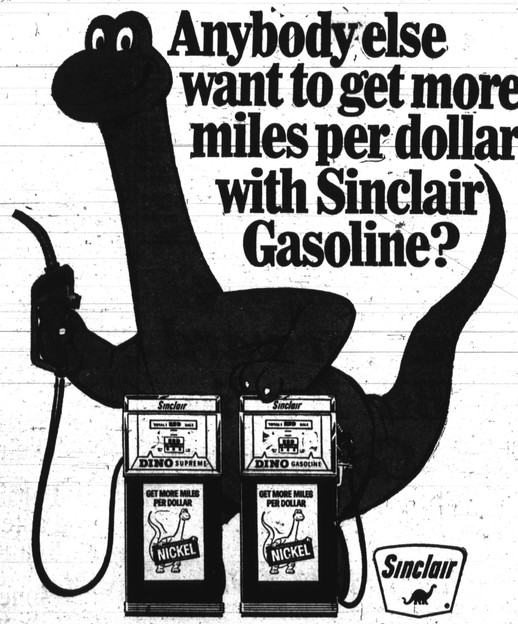

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