

HOW TO BECOME HANDY WITH YOUR FISTS!

Some Valuable Boxing Tips from Mr. Percy Longhurst

There *are* instances of good boxers, first-class boxers, men who have ultimately fought for and won championships, never having had a boxing lesson during the whole of their career, but it's just as well to remember that these individuals are exceptional; that because they succeed in doing well without expert instruction gives no reason to believe that every lad with a taste for boxing needs no instruction in the art.

Jem Belcher, one of the earliest and most successful of English champions, taught himself; one of the real champions and most scientific boxers of the present day, Jim Driscoll, and one of the gamest fighters, an ex-champion, Tancy Lee, the Scot, also never received a boxing lesson in his life. But these men won success and fame simply because they could not help becoming champions; they did not succeed because they had not had the opportunity for youthful instruction in the art. For the average fellow to attempt to learn boxing without the advice and assistance of someone knowing the game is for him to court disappointment and disaster.

<Image: A friendly handshake before the commencement of a bout.>

But the instruction must be of the right kind. The instructor who gives his pupil a hard clout on the jaw or a severe drive in "the wind," and says, "Now, that's the thing to do to your opponent. Now don't let me do it again t you," isn't a bit of use to the enthusiastic novice. He isn't instructing him at all. In a good many cases he is simply administering a severe check to the youngster's enthusiasm.

Fortunately there isn't so much of that type of instructor as there used to be when I was myself trying to learn boxing. But he does still exist. And he does a deal of harm, far more than he does good.

Then again there is the kind of instruction which the novice tries to obtain from a text book. It may be – very probably is – written by a good man, that is to say a successful boxer. But being a successful performer with the gloves doesn't necessarily mean that the individual is a good instructor. I can call to mind one tutor I had, at one time the second best man of his weight in England. He gave me many lessons, and a lot more besides; but later I realised that as an instructor he was a bad failure. He knew all right what ought to be done, and he could do it, but he had not a notion of teaching a novice how *he* was to do it.

<Image: A turn with the punchball is excellent practice. Even Billy Bunter sometimes indulges in it.>

The trouble with most text books is that they are far too advanced for the novice. They try to get the novice to attempt things which he ought carefully to leave alone until he has gained quite a lot of experience. The A B C of the game isn't taught. Trying to learn from an average text book is very much like trying to read before one has mastered the alphabet – and about as useful.

Without letting the novice attempt to break running records before has learned properly how to walk, it is possible to develop rather than lessen his interest and enthusiasm, while yet at the same time taking care that he doesn't miss the foundations of boxing knowledge and ultimate skill. A boxing lesson is no fun at all unless *some* real boxing is to enter it.

In the army there is a system by which the liking of a bout of fisticuffs is encouraged and developed to the greatest possible extent. Men are taught so that they contrive to get a deal of fun and interest out of it even while learning. I'd like to see the young boxing novices get similar treatment.

Bouts are arranged between novices, and each man is told that he is to do his best to hit the other fellow on the nose. There is no need to hit hard – he isn't wanted to it hard, just a tap will do. The watching instructor stops the contest as soon as one man touches the other's nose. He is the winner. Then the instructor gives advice, and a few hints to the loser, showing how he might have prevented the point being made against him, and to the winner indicating how he might have won sooner. Then the pair are matched with two more men, and they begin all over.

<Image: “Give the novice just one definite thing to do – to reach his opponent's nose – and he'll try to do it.”>

It is wonderful how this system appeals to the men. To lads it would have just as strong an appeal. Let them try it. They'll learn ever so much more quickly than by a system which gives them a dozen bits of advice to remember; that he mustn't get his right foot in advance, that he mustn't get his feet crossed, that he must look after his guard, that he must hit with a straight left, and from the shoulder with all his weight behind the blow, and not just from the elbow, that he must hit with the knuckle part of the glove – these and many other points which in ordinary instruction are dinned into the ears of the novice are too much for him. He simply *can't* recollect to pay attention to all these points at the same time. If he actually tries he gets confused, he does nothing well or wholeheartedly, and he is worried by his non-success. He isn't getting any fun out of the game.

But give him just one definite thing to do – to reach his opponent's nose – and he'll recollect that, and try to do it. The mistakes he makes in trying it can be corrected afterwards. A bit at a time is the way to learn, the average boxing novice isn't taught that way, he is supposed to learn everything at once. And it's too much.

Boxing novices, try this army tip, and I guess that you'll think well of it. Without knowing it your boxing will improve. You'll soon realise that the villainous round arm swinging (and that's not confined to novices by a long way) isn't a bit of use in helping you get at the other chap's nose. Without thinking of it you'll learn to hit straight. Not being called upon to guard shots at the body, swings at the head – attempts to hit you anywhere and everywhere, you'll pick up the knack of parrying four times as fast as you will by trying to box according to the old rule of thumb methods.

You'll quickly learn the value of feinting, of drawing your opponent's guard, of tricking him, also of overcoming such tricks. You'll learn to think quickly, to move quickly, and to hit quickly. Give this new method a trial and you'll quickly see the advantage of it. When you stand up to your opponent you'll do so with a definite object. You'll know exactly what you ought to do and mean to do. Get out the gloves, get your chum to join you, and make a start with this army tip right away. That's my advice to the novice boxer.

Source: Thee Greyfriars Holiday Annual for Boys and Girls 1922 (London)