

Let's go to the bar and talk this over. The minute I heard that statement I opened both ears. The one talking was Jack Rufus and he was talking to Johnny Sparks. These two boys paired up to make the best fight-promoting team in the East. I followed them because when they had things to talk over, the results always proved interesting, and it was my place to get whatever news they had. Yeah. I'm a reporter.

Jack! says Johnny, I've got a new boy that's hotter'n two kinds of hell. Jacks says so what and nothing more. It's like this says Johnny again. This boy I've found will be the next champ, yeah, I said the next champ. Of course he will have to take a few fights and get a reputation for himself first, but I'll bet all the money I have that inside of two years he'll be the only contender left. There's only one thing wrong, but you can fix that. Jack began to get a little suspicious so Johnny went on talking. It's the kid's sister. She doesn't think he should be fighting. Well, now, ain't that something says Jack, what are you doing, robbing the cradle?

I slid up a little closer to see if I could get the kid's name. Johnny says to Jack that he should make a play for the kid's sister and get her on his side, getting her to like boxing. Not letting her know of course that he was in on the deal. They worked every angle out right there and then. It would have been a good story to break as it was, but I wasn't so sure that this was the time to break it; there might be more to it.

Well, things went along a little faster than Johnny had figured and it wasn't quite a year before the kid was ready to fight the champ, and it looked like he was going to beat him. The story broke in the morning that Frankie Dikes, the kid, had retired from the ring. Here he was on the eve of the championship bout, retiring. There must be something wrong. You know I have heard of plenty of the boys retiring after they have become champs, but none before they even fought. The story I picked up is pretty good so I'm going to pass it on to you.

Frankie was about nineteen, blond hair and blue eyes. Not one inch of his face looked that of a fighter. But his body, now that was something different. Big shoulders, slim hips and thin ankles. He could weave,

dodge and his timing was almost perfect.

Both of us were in the same boat. The kid had to slip off from his sister and I had to jump the paper for a couple of hours every day in order to see him workout. It was kinda funny, the interest I took in this complete stranger.

After a few weeks Jack began to show up with Frankie's sister. The big lug always had a grin all over his face. It was hard to tell just what he was grinning at. But if it had been me, I would have felt kinda happy myself, that is if she was hanging on my arm.

After about two months of good, hard training Frankie was ready. His first fight was to be over in Jersey so we all went. By this time Jack had convinced the kid's sister that it wasn't such a bad racket and she was as ready to go as we were.

The kid was fighting an ex-sailor that was rough and tough. In fact he looked so mean from where I was sitting that I crossed my fingers.

The bell sounded and the fight was on. The sailor came clear across the ring in two jumps, took a long left stab at the kid's face. He missed but caught him was a right cross that hit the kid on the side of the head. The kid couldn't get his bearings, but he managed to stay away from the sailor.

They sparred for an opening, then all of a sudden the kid let go. A right, a left, another right, another left, then a series of body punches that put the sailor on his bike. The kid finally cornered him and went through the same routine again. The sailor couldn't throw a punch. Talk about form! The kid was perfect and was merciless in his attempt to floor his opponent. Another left to the face, then another, and to finish the bout the kid started one from the floor. Telegraphed? Sure it was but the sailor couldn't move. The kid won by a knockout in the first round.

I followed the kid wherever he fought, in the papers, of course. Fourteen knockouts in less than a year. That's a good record in any league.

The fifteenth fight brought the kid back home to the Garden. He was in the big competition now and had a name for himself. His opponent was a smooth boxer who had almost the same reputation as the kid and the fight was a cinch to be a good one. The winner was the undisputed challenger for the championship.

The bell sounded and they were at

it. Both fighting for a chance at the champ. His opponent had a powerful right hand that the kid had been warned to stay away from, but try as he could that right was always shaking him a bit. The first round proved nothing, both men were in the best of condition and it looked like the fight would be a decision match.

It was in the second round that the kid got an awful lick in the middle of his forehead. The blow knocked the kid down. He stayed for the count of nine then was up on his feet throwing gloves all over the place. Some landed, some didn't; but those that did made the other guy steer clear for awhile. I could see, in my own dumb way that something was wrong. His timing was off, way off.

It was the sixth round that broke up the fight and brought back my ten 'iron-men'—I could see myself eating beans for a week if the kid lost. But like I said it was the sixth that finished the fight. The kid floored him twice before the referee called a technical knockout.

Right after the fight Jack and the kid's sister were married. Everyone was feeling swell. The coming champ complained of a headache and went home to bed.

A couple of weeks after the last fight I went around to see the kid in action. Not seeing him at the gym, I went to Johnny's office.

Hi ya Johnny! How are things going. Rotten he says, and the way he said it, I believed him. He asked me can I keep a secret, so I says yes. I had my fingers crossed, just in case it was something big that I could use. The kid's going blind, he says. The doc said another fight would cost him his eyesight. That's a tough break, especially just before his big fight. That's the reason Frankie Dikes quit the fight game. He had two swell managers and they were going to see to it that nothing happened to him whether he could fight or not.

The three of them opened a restaurant right after the retirement and when I saw that I figured then was the time to break the story. There hadn't been one until now. I wrote the story up and it ran a whole column in the Sunday paper—it got me a bonus and would you believe it—Johnny called me up and told me to eat with them any time I got ready and it would be on the house. Now I charge the expense account for my meals and put the money in my pocket.