

Mike McAbner had the next lightweight champ under his wing, if only the Kid would answer the bell to fight his opponents as fast as he answered the bell to fight a fire!



ANOTHER GOOFY
FITE STORY

They used pivot punches, rabbit and everything but biting in the clinches.

there's Hicks in all trades

by tom thursday

I DON'T want to keep anybody in suspense, so I will break down and confess that this is all about the following mugs, to wit., viz., and even i.e.—Funny Puss Hicks, Blood Thirsty McGaff, Calithumpian Silo, and yours sincerely, if necessary, Mike McAbner.

Funny Puss and me have been managing fighters along the same routes for years and we got along like Hitler and Churchill. Each time our boys were matched to entertain the customers I would be obliged to have the referee examine his brat's gloves to see whether or not they contained plain plaster of Paris, half of horseshoe or a small iron lid. For the first five years these jovial methods of

Funny Puss were highly amusing but when they got to the stage where he claimed foul each time my boy belted his on the chin, that was a nag from a different racetrack.

Well, to reduce a novelette to a short story, I got so sick of Mr. Hick's coy and cute methods that I almost decided to retire from the fight racket until Funny Puss joined the Nazi army or slipped off the top of the Empire State Building, the same thing, in my opinion. Too much is just overdoing it and my nerves became as shattered as Warsaw. At the time I have one belting beauty entitled Horizontal McHokum, a welter, who is doing all right, until someone socked him, after which he always

mistook the ring floor for a feather bed.

I am about to go nuts, even thinking of going to Moscow with the object of starting up a Republican Party, when I get a very welcome letter from my Uncle Ebenezer Merrifellow, up in a slab named Yipp Center, N.Y. Uncle says he always liked me and would like nothing better than for me to pay him a visit, tumble around the farm, and make myself at home. I had a idea that there was a catch to it and it turned out that there was. The name of the catch was Calithumpian Silo, who uncle stated was the champeen of Patch County, and was due to flatten Joe the Louis when he grew up.

I reach Yipp Center a few days later and am amazed to find that Calithumpian Silo is far from a flopola. The kid is about eighteen, a natural lightweight, and has the courage of a whole family of lions. He works out in the barn, where he has rigged up a hick gym, with pulleys, a heavy bag and a light one. Of course, he is not over-bright; if he was, what the hell would he want to be a boxer for? He would be a manager—and I heard what you said.

His main punch is a straight right, about the hardest blow in the biz, and the guy who can shoot it over accurately is not en route to the showers.

"I'd like for you to box with me a little, Mr. McAbner," he says.

Personally, I am supposed to be a great expert on the art of boxing and even the great sports writers come to me to settle matters of the ring, but no one ever thought I was dumb enough to go into the ring and do a little fisticuffing. My mamma never reared no stupid children, although I did wind up as a fight manager, when I might have gone into the vegetable business with my cousin Oscar Bibbonkleit.

"I see no reason why I should not give you the advantage of my great knowledge and ability," I says to Calithumpian. "However," I says, "you will please not bust my beak any harder than absolutely necessary. As to those two sails you note on each side of my head, they are my ears, and they are not to be hit with too much steam. Regarding my stomach, it is a wee bit weak, whilst my kidneys are not in the best of condition."

Mons. Silo gives me a quizzical look and blinks his eyes, not that he could blink anything else.

"D'yer mind, Mr. McAbner," he whinnies, "if I hit yah on the chin?"

"That reminds me," I says, "I have just had a

neat set of teeth, upper and lower berths, placed in my mouth and too much jarring might annoy them."

He thinks that one over for a moment, then scratches his head.

"Mr. McAbner," he drawls finally, "maybe you and me better play a game of checkers, huh?"

Just then we hear a loud gong, coming from the center of town.

Bong Bong.

"Did yuh hear it? Did yuh *hear* it? It's a fire—an' I gotta drive the hose cart. See yuh later, Mr. McAbner!"

He dashed outside, mounted a hoss, and rode like hell toward town. It seems that they have a volunteer fire department in Yipp Center and Calithumpian is not only the chief but the guy who does the driving. The alarm is a large iron hoop gong and when a fire breaks out, or even in, you belt it with a large hammer.

THE following day I begin to teach him the six fundamental blows of the gentle art of getting punch-dizzy. There are others, but the main socks are as follows: The left jab is considered the most essential of all and the mug who knows how to use it is sitting sweet. It is used as a defensive and offensive smack and causes considerable anguish to the opposing gent, just ask the lads who have received some.

Comes the left hook, which is used to lead and counter with, and the boy who knows his hanswurst can even lay his playmate on the floor with it. Then the swing, somewhat like the hook, known as the sleep-producer when the sports writers mention it. Then the straight right, a sizzling sock, when the boy who knows how to send it in. Most of the kayos of the ring are delivered by this blow. Next, the uppercut, which should always be used as a counterpunch, and the one most used to score a finisher with. Last, the chop, sent in while the hand is held above the shoulder, usually over the other guy's head. Quite annoying, but it does little damage.

As to the much-written about and much-yapped about one-two punch—nuts! This much overrated socking is delivered with a fast left to the head or bean, followed with a right to the same spot. It is rarely a success in anything more than jarring the other mug and causing him to do a little extry sniffing through the beakola. Schools out!

Well, while on the subject of French-fried Nazis, I spend a few weeks in putting Calithumpian through some snappy paces and he shapes up very swell. At the end of two weeks he begins to wonder why he can't get a crack at Joe Louis or even Two-Jowl Galento. I try to get a boy to box him but it seems that the only two lads in the land who know how to put a glove on their hands, instead of their feet, have already been knocked canvasward by my hero and do not care for another treatment via the same source.

This state of affairs is very sad, like Hitler with a panful of kosher and I am about to send out a hurry-call for some fight-fodder, when manna drops from a freight train. This is in the form of a bindlestiff or the like and I meet him whilst he is canvassing the town's best grease-garage—Oxford for beanery—in search of some steaming coffee and perhaps a snack of sauerbraten, whatever that is. I soon note, with unsurpassed pleasure, that one of his ears is a member of Cauliflower Avenue, which means he never got it playing the dog races.

"A boxer, hey?" I says.

"Yeah," he comes back. "I got in a jam back East with the burglar what managed me and I had to lam out."

"Anything serious?"

"Nothing much, only I got bored watching him chisel ninety percent of my purses and just socked him over the conk with a water bucket. I think the lug has croaked so I get scared and beat it out of town. Later, I learn that the louse is okay. In the meanwhile, I am a bum."

"Got a name?"

"They call me Kid Oakie Dokey, and I had about fifty professional fights. I won most of them with a punch."

"Except them that you lost," I adds. "What's your real name, seeing that it's none of my business."

"Ferdinand P. Mallory."

"What's the 'P' stand for?"

"Percival."

"I'll take Kid Oakie Dokey."

I pay the feed bill for Herr Oakie Dokey and arrange to have him box Calithumpian Silo one week from tonight. Of course, I have to stake him to some grits and gravy dough and see that he does a little training, but what do I care for three bucks?

THE county is aroused over their pet punkalooka being matched with an outsider and the night of the two-man Warsaw the little arena is packed. It was a typical rube audience, with farmers to the right of you, farmers to the left of you—onward the hay and the vegetables.

"Now, listen," I say to Calithumpian. "You just walk right out and paste this merry monkey on the kisser. See?"

"Where at is this kisser?" he wants to know.

"The kisser, my friend, is Yale for mug. Get it?"

"Sure," he says. "You want that I should punch him right in the belly, huh?"

"That," I retorts, "is quite near enough." The bell.

Herr Oakie Dokey rushes from his corner with the sincere intention of knocking Calithumpian into the nearest hayloft with a left hook to the jaw. It just miffed my brat by a mere split-hair, due to the fact that Oakie Dokey's timing was not on time. It had more steam behind it than a boiler room and it was just as well that it missed the mark. Had it landed, Calithumpian would have landed with it and against it.

Calithumpian gets in close and shoots in a right uppercut. Oakie Dokey snarls and remarks that my boy is a very large bum and where did he learn how to box? This crack makes Calithumpian get a bit red in the puss and he pushes Oakie Dokey away so hard that he nearly upsets him on his sit-spot.

The chaste customers, sensing a grudge fight, whoop it up for Silo. Oakie Dokey dances to the center of the ring and tries to knock down Calithumpian's left guard. This is a major error on Oakie Dokey's part. Silo lets go his straight right and it lands plum on the chinola of Herr Dokey. He falls over, frontwards, flat on his beak, which is a pretty sure sign that a boxer has lost interest in the business at hand. He is out as far as Long Island, if you know what I mean. If you don't, write a letter to the papers.

The hometowners are now sure they have the next lightweight champ of the earth and give the boy a very large hand. As for Calithumpian, he is puffed up like Goering, which same is plenty of air.

"When do I fight next, Mr. McAbner?" he wants to know. "See if you can make it tomorrer night, huh?"

"Keep your pajamas on," I says. "Rome wasn't built in a day."

"Why?" he wants to know.

"Labor trouble, I guess. Meantime, you ain't no Benny Leonard or Joe Gans."

"Why not?"

"I will send you four or five books on the matter when I get back to New York. It would take me six months to tell you why not. Just let it go and take it easy."

I am puzzling what passes for my mind to dig up another playmate for Calithumpian when I read in the papers where my old pal and annoyer, Funny Puss Hicks, is in Buffalo. He is exhibiting a new lightweight of his with the tasty and terrible title of Blood Thirsty McGaff. He is boxing one Socker Swandive in that burg and I hit upon the notion that I would like Funny Puss to come forth to Yipp Center with his new prize and do some mayhem with Calithumpian Silo.

THE next day Funny Puss receives one of my most cajoling and persuasive diplomatic notes—Chamberlain should of seen it—and I tell Hicks that I have missed him and that all is forgiven. I go on to state that here is no reason why two old-timers should be on the outs when they could be on the ins, especially when there is some dough to be had. I then give a hawk's-eye view of Calithumpian Silo, showing all of his good points and rot like that, and wind up by suggesting that we could both haul down some sweet sugar if he would up stakes and hie to Yipp Center.

Funny Puss replies that he is very delighted, indeed, to hear from an old palsy-walsy, and he says how much he has missed me, the liar. What is more, he will be proud and happy to come to Yipp Center and partake of the home life down on the farm, etc., and etc. He winds up his letter by enquiring whether he is supposed to have his brat box for a bouquet of fertilizer or a can of Soviet spinach. In other words, Funny Puss wants to know whether or not he gets paid or just comes for the ride and the fresh country air. I promptly reply that he can have all of twenty-five percent of the gross whilst I shall be satisfied with a mere thirty-five percent, seeing that I am not only the manager but the matchmaker as well. He does not appear to take kindly to my mathematics and wants to know if I am managing Adolf Hitler or Joe Stalin, seeing that my idea of percentage leaves him on the outskirts of the almshouse. He also remarks in a P.S. that they do not care to walk from Buffalo to Yipp Center, especially with carpet slippers, and will I be

good enough to send on the fare?

Since there will be no fight unless I send him the dough, I put the bite on Uncle Ebenezer for the chips, and hurl it toward Herr Hicks. He arrives three days later, full of corn and weird ideas, or what have you behind the bar.

I proudly display Calithumpian to Funny Puss in the gym and he says I have a positive world champ if I keep him out of the ring, and don't allow him to see too many movies.

"You are still half-witted," I says. "Have you ever seen a better prospect?"

"Prospect for what?" he demands. "Plumbing, steamfitting, or just plain farming?"

"If you would care to back up your loose lingo with some cash, either hot or cold, I will be happy to wager that Calithumpian Silo belts Blood Thirsty McGaff out of the ring within three rounds."

"If the fight is with regulation three-ounce gloves," says Funny Puss, "I will be glad to accept your bet, Mr. McAbner. Of course, if you are gonna send your mug into the ring with a war tank in one hand and a machine gun in the other, anything is liable to happen."

"I will be glad to bet my end of the purse against yours," I says.

"I will be glad to take your dough," says Funny Face. "Er, who will hold the money?"

"I will hold the money," I says.

"If it is all the same to you," he comes back, "I will be happy to have my money held by either Captain Kidd or John Dillinger."

"Would the mayor of Yipp Center be okay?" I ask. "He is also president of Corn County National Bank and an Elk."

"Oh, a Elk, hey?" says Funny Puss. "That is okay by me. I am also a Elk."

So that was all settled.

Just then the fire bell goes *bong! bong!* and pretty soon the hose cart comes dashing down the street with Calithumpian Silo driving like mad.

"What is this," demands Funny Puss, "a scene from the Gay Nineties?"

"That," I says, "is the Yipp Center Volunteer Fire Department in action. Speed, hey?"

"Is that your boy driving?"

"That's him—the next lightweight champeen of the world."

"The next world, not this one," says Funny Puss.

WELL, Yipp Center is all het up over the forthcoming Silo-McGaff two-man World War, and I have a great load of refined and granulated goo about the mess in the *Corn County Clarion*, a weekly, with the accent on the weak. I give Silo forty chances to McGaff's one to win the fight and when Funny Puss sees the write-up he calls on the editor and wants to sue him for libel. Meanwhile, he struts around town and drops casual remarks hither and likewise yon that it is a crime the way a nice little boy like Calithumpian Silo is going to get his face pasted proper by a real boxer like Blood Thirsty McGaff. This bragging gets the local yokels all sored up, since they are sure that Calithumpian could lick both Mussolini and Hitler with nothing more potent than a bow and arrow. They want to know if Funny Puss has any money that he wouldst like to lose on the brawl and Herr Hicks says he is very sorry, indeed, that he does not control the gold supply so he could bet it all on McGaff. He covers about three hundred bucks of the natives' dough and all the time I thought the big bum was broke!

Coming to the Silo-McGaff fandago, I am delighted that none of the big sports writers was at the ringside. It is too bad, though, that none of the Hollywood talent scouts were there, especially those looking for half-wit and humor. No fooling, what actually happened would of made tramps out of Charlie Chaplin and the Ritz Brothers!

Shortly before the fight, Funny Puss comes into our undressing room and wants to know if I would like to cancel the bets, seeing that he has hooked the natives for all the dough that he will need for some time.

"I never trim a pal," he says. "I never like to steal babies from candy."

"Never mind me," I says. "When this fight is over, you will go home in a barrel."

"I hope the barrel is full of beer," he says. "Well, suit yourself, sucker. Remembah, I give you a chance to pull out of a bum bet."

"The only bum around here is Blood Thirsty McGaff. See you at the ringside!"

I gave Calithumpian some specific instructions before he entered the ring, account of I did not want him to be killed whilst so young. Personally, I didn't know whether McGaff was good, no good or just lousy, because I only seen him perform in the gym. And don't let any mug tell you that they can get the lowdown on a boxer from his gym work.

That's the apple fritters, smothered in baloney.

"Do not worry about me, Mr. McAbner," says Calithumpian, "I will whip this McGaff fellow with no trouble at all. All I want to do is hit him one good one in the belly. I don't like him nohow. I met him on the street the other day and he says something I do not like. No, sir, I do not like what he says at all."

"What did he say?"

"He says that if I do not go to the hospital I will go to the undertaker. I do not like such talk, Mr. McAbner, and I will hit him much harder because that is no way to talk to me."

"You are quite right," I says. "He is no gent and his manager is also no gent. Go right out and smack him over. Don't forget that straight right. Don't forget, you can lead a hoss to water, but a punch must be driven."

The referee calls the lads to the center of the ring and gives his idea of the latest in instructions. He tells them to hit in the clinches, if they feel like it, but that no fouls will be allowed. He also says that the rounds will be four minutes, instead of three, because it makes the fight longer. He begins to tell them about how long the Sullivan-Kilrain fight was when I give the signal for the timekeeper to bank the bell.

Calithumpian jumps from his corner like he was on springs and meets McGaff before he could get to the center of the ring. My boy starts with the notion that he will slay him with his famed straight right but McGaff had other ideas. As Silo swung, McGaff slipped to the left and my boy muffed a ring post by a mere razor-edge. Had that sock landed, the fight would of been on ice. So would Mons. McGaff.

WHILE my brat is wondering how McGaff got away, Funny Puss's lad makes a right flank movement, comes up behind Silo and clips him on the back of the neck. Calithumpian turned to me for advice, the wee bit upset.

"Sock him right in the kisser," I says.

"Sure," says Silo, "right in the belly!"

McGaff feints with his left. No dice. McGaff slips in a sweet left hook to the chinola. This irks Calithumpian and he decides to get in a punch himself, seeing that there are two men in the ring and both have the same privilege.

He rushed at McGaff and, after first taking a light one-two on the mush, he lets go his straight

right. He put everything but the U.S. Marines in that punch and when he connected, McGaff flopped over backwards on his rear-housing. His eyes are somewhat glazed and he has a most peculiar expression on his front page.

I yelled to Calithumpian to get into a neutral corner so the referee can count right up to one hundred and fifty-six, if need be, but he turns to me and wants to know what the hell a neutral corner may be? I point to the farthest corner away from the resting McGaff, otherwise he might have gone to Berlin or perhaps Moscow.

The referee, without waiting to see whether Calithumpian was in a neutral corner or in the Bronx, began a count over McGaff that was enough to make an adding machine think it was a snail. Of course, I do not complain at the fast counting, although Funny Puss Hicks is not entirely satisfied with the speedy mathematics.

"I am being framed!" whinnied Funny Puss.

"You are far from an oil painting," I says. "Quiet, please."

The hometowners yell down any more remarks that came from Herr Hicks and he begins to make faces at one and all. He also showed some new finger movements, that neither Stokowski or Paderewski need on the piano, the movements of Funny Puss being between the thumb and the nose.

When the referee reached eight—in about four seconds—McGaff moved his eyes, shook his head, and then seemed amazed to find himself on the floor. Knowing that fights are rarely won from that position he made arrangements to leap from that location with much speed and alacrity. He grabs Calithumpian around the shoulders and holds on like tanglefoot to a fly. My brat looks toward me for advice and I motion him to break away.

"Kick 'im in the shins!" hollers some polite townner from the two-bit seats. Silo thinks this advice is very sound and promptly lands on McGaff's dogs with both large feet.

With a yell, McGaff broke and began to merry-go-round, his face twisted from hurt toes. Funny Puss claims everything from foul to Danzig, much to the amusement of the customers. The bell saves McGaff and he hobbled back to his corner. I catch the eye of Funny Puss and wave to him in my most jovial manner. He again uses the famed finger movement, thumb to beak and fingers waving like Kansas wheat in the breeze.

"You are a cinch to win," I says to

Calithumpian.

"Yup," he says. "But why don't that fellow let me hit him?"

"Just bashful, I guess. But you just go right out and sock him down. He needs a rest, anyway."

THE second round was quite fast, indeed. They looked like a pair of club fighters, meaning sucker fighters, who please the crowd—and wind up on their heels. They also used pivot punches, rabbit punches and everything but biting in the clinches. That must have been an oversight on their part. I call the attention to the dizzy referee to the illegal socks and he tells me to mind my own business, if any.

During the fourth minute of the round, Silo backs McGaff into his own corner and nails him with his straight right. Bam. Right on the kisser, Harvard for face. Again McGaff decides to meet the canvas halfway, and flops to the floor. Funny Puss yelps his tonsils out, claiming foul, murder and assorted kidnapping.

Calithumpian, in his excitement, goes to three different corners before he decides which one is perfectly neutral. He finally picks out the one next to Funny Puss and tries to crown him with the water bucket. I wave Silo over to my side and watch McGaff play Rip Van Winkle on the canvas.

McGaff stirs at the count of seven, wiggles his left leg, twitches an eyebrow, then blinks at the dome lights. Making up his mind that he was in a fight, not a tea party, he struggles to the fray and goes into a very clinchy clinch. The way he held onto Silo you would think McGaff was in love with him.

The mob howls for the referee to break them, even if it is necessary to hit McGaff over the dome with a ring post. The referee had his own rules about boxing, whatever they were, having taken a correspondence course in blacksmithing.

The bell saved McGaff and Funny Puss jumped into the ring and took his pet to the stool. The lad didn't know whether he was in the ring or in Albania.

The third round will be the last—don't walk out yet!

They come out fighting, as the sports writers innocently remark, and Silo clips McGaff with a right uppercut to the chin. McGaff staggers and indicates that he is not fond of any uppercuts to the chin, or even elsewhere. He shoves two weak rights

into Silo's pan, and then backs away like Calithumpian had the mange or maybe smallpox. Silo comes back with a right cross to the head, and McGaff don't care for that, either, proving that he is hard to please.

Just then I look toward the corner of Funny Face, with the noble object of giving him a pleasant smile, and note that he is nowhere to be seen. But at that moment the boys do some solid and swift mixing and I think no more of the strange disappearance of Herr Hicks.

Soon McGaff is horizontal on the canvas, from another straight right, and it seems that he will remain there until the referee counts at least a thousand.

And then a very annoying thing happened!
Bong! Bo-n-ng! Bong!

IT was the fire bell. Half the customers, members of the volunteer fire department, left their seats and began to climb over each other's heads toward the exits. What a scramble! I am in the direct line of fire and do I get trampled. To make matters worse, as the guy remarked who found ketchup on his oatmeal, a heavy body seemed to jump on me and knock me to the floor. I disentangle myself from a load of arms and legs and see what hit me. It is no less than Calithumpian Silo and he is all excited.

"Hurry, Mr. McAbner!" he shouts. "Get me outta here—quick. I gotta drive the hose cart. I gotta drive the hose cart!"

"Get back in that ring!" I commands. "If you leave you will be disqualified and lose the fight, which same you have won!"

"Sorry," he says. "Can't help it. *I tell yuh I gotta drive the hose cart!*"

I look toward the ring and see the referee counting over the manly form of Blood Thirsty McGaff. When the count reaches nine McGaff gets to his pins and staggers around like he had just finished a gallon of Florida corn. He sees the referee dimly and makes a feeble pass at his nose with his right paw. The referee ducks and grins. Next, the referee notes that Calithumpian Silo has left the ring. Reaching for McGaff's right hand he raises it high in the air.

"The winnah!" he bleats. "Silo is hereby and herewith disqualified for leavin' the ring while the fight is goin' on!"

Don't we have fun!

I see Funny Puss Hicks the following morning. He is quite proud and happy, having collected all bets, and did the big bum cash in!

"Nice morning," he says.

"What is nice about it?" I demands.

"I never noticed it was raining," he goes on.

"I never noticed that you banged that fire gong last night, either!" I snaps. "But I know it now."

"What was wrong with it?" he says. "Did you expect me to play a tune on it?"

"I never knew Captain Kidd had a brother."

"D'yer mean to tell me that there wasn't any fire last night?" he asks.

"Fire—hell! It was just another false alarm—like Blood Thirsty McGaff."

"Nice to have met you, Mr. McAbner," he says, and struts nonchalantly down the street.

"Nuts to you, Mr. Hicks!"

Well, to come to the end of a perfect fray, I don't see Funny Puss again until three months later. I'm strolling around the New York World's Fair when who should I lamp but Hicks, looking a bit seedy and down on his luck. He greets me with brotherly affection, the big stiff, and wants to know how I am getting on in the world.

"I know you have forgotten that little trick I pulled up in Yipp Center," he says. "It was all in fun. Ha ha!"

"No hard feelings," I says. "Ha ha!"

"I always says you were a swell guy."

"Thanks," I says. "The fact of the matter is, I have forgotten all about it."

"You are a great guy."

"Have dinner yet?" I asks.

"No," he says. "To tell the truth I ain't been doing so well lately. Tough luck. Just got about seven bucks to my name."

ITAKE him into the French Casino and tell him to order from soup to nuts. The bill comes to sixty and when we reach the dessert I ask him to pardon me a moment, as I have to make an important telephone call.

"I'll be right back," I says, "and bring some cigars."

Two minutes later I am on a phone and ask for the French Casino.

"Please tell that funny looking guy sitting alone at the left side to come to the phone," I says to the lad who answers. A few seconds later Funny Puss is on the wire.

“Kid,” I says, “I am very sorry, indeed, to tell you that I can’t get back.”

I hear a gargle or the like. Funny Puss has lost his breath.

“Hey, listen,” he yelps, “you can’t do this to me. All I got is seven bucks and the bill is six-fifty!”

“That makes it about right,” I purrs. “Just leave

the extra fifty cents for the waiter!”

“What do you mean?” he wants to know.

“I forgot to tell you,” I says, “that I am a member of the fire department and someone just turned in a three-alarm fire. I gotta drive the hose cart.”

There’s hicks in all trades!