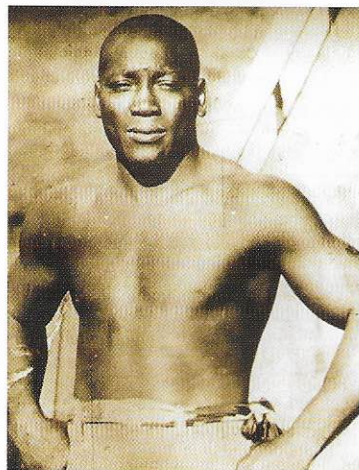


that punch.” Stanley Ketchel became the first boxer in history to win the middleweight championship twice.

Nat Fleischer, boxing historian and founder of *Ring* magazine, wrote of the Michigan man, “Ketchel was one of the greatest fighters of my time. All stone and ice concentration when he entered the ring. Ketchel scorned the word retreat. A demon of the roped square, he made his opponents think that all the furies in Hades had been turned loose on them. He got his punches away from all angles. If he missed with one hand, he would nail him with the other. He was game as a bulldog and tough as a bronco.”

Ketchel began 1909 by defending his title in a 10-round, no-decision affair against the reigning light heavyweight champion, “Philadelphia Jack” O’Brien. In the rematch a few months later, Ketchel knocked O’Brien out cold in three rounds. He then beat Papke by decision in their fourth and final brawl that went the full, 20-round distance and left both fighters with broken hands. Next, Ketchel set his sights on the crown jewel of his sport: the heavyweight championship of the world.



The black boxer Jack Johnson had been the number-one contender for the heavyweight championship for several years but, because of his race, was repeatedly denied a shot at the title held by Tommy Burns. In December 1908, an Australian promoter, Hugh McIntosh, offered Burns the sum of \$60,000 to fight Johnson in

Sydney. Outclassed by Johnson, the mismatch went on for 14 rounds before the police intervened and stopped the match to save Burns the embarrassment of a knockout. With that fight, Johnson became the first African-American world heavyweight boxing champion.

Once Johnson had the title in his possession, he flaunted his superiority and refused to abide by the unwritten rules of conduct imposed on blacks at the time. In an age where a black man could be lynched for even flirting with a white woman, Johnson courted white women openly and married three of them.

The search for a contender who could return the boxing crown to the white race officially began when Jack London, working the Johnson-Burns fight as a special correspondent for the *New York Herald*, issued his famous



Above: Ketchel practiced his powerful punches for the Jack Johnson fight. Left: Johnson was the world heavyweight champion at the time.

proclamation: “[James] Jeffries [the retired, undefeated heavyweight champion] must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove the golden smile from Johnson’s face. Jeff, it’s up to you...”

Johnson enjoyed his title, defending his crown several times against lesser opponents. All challengers were easily defeated by his far-superior ring skills. The only fighter on the horizon who could test Johnson was two weight classes below the heavyweight limit. By now, Stanley Ketchel had beaten all competition in his division and was considered a legitimate challenger for Johnson’s throne.

It was believed that a Johnson-Ketchel bout would draw record crowds and generate enormous earnings for everyone involved. The management teams of both parties scrambled to make this fight a reality, finally agreeing to a 20-round bout in October 1909 at Coffroth’s Mission Street Arena.

Coffroth offered Johnson \$65,000 to defend his title. With Johnson weighing in at 205 pounds against Ketchel’s 170, the “Galveston Giant” felt confident in the outcome. A prefight agreement was reached between both camps to extend the fight for the full 20 rounds, so that motion-picture cameras could record the action. The film would later be released to theaters worldwide, with the fighters splitting the box-office profits.

The film shows the muscular heavyweight manhandling Ketchel around the ring, knocking him down in the second and third rounds. By the 11th, Ketchel, bruised and bleeding from Johnson’s rough tactics, felt that their prefight agreement had been violated. After a series of give-and-take exchanges in round 12, Ketchel suddenly exploded with a right hand causing Johnson to crash to