

The intent young man on the opposite page is Jimmy Jacobs, who leads an unpublicized but many-splendored life. He is the best handball player in the world, a talented producer of fight films and a rabid collector of comic books. His achievements are such that admirers say he—not Cassius Clay—is

REALLY THE GREATEST

BY ROBERT H. BOYLE

NEIL LEIFER

There is no athlete in the world who dominates his sport with the supremacy that Jimmy Jacobs of Los Angeles and New York enjoys in four-wall handball. Handball is a demanding sport that requires endurance, speed, power and dexterity, all of which the muscular Jacobs, who stands 5 feet 9 and weighs 175 pounds, has in abundance. In handball, which has more than five million devotees in the U.S., Jacobs is generally hailed as the finest player of all time. Indeed, there are those who say Jacobs is the best athlete, regardless of sport, in the country. So far, Jacobs has won six U.S. Handball Association singles championships and has shared in four USHA doubles titles. With Marty Decatur, a fellow player from the 92nd Street YMHA in New York, he forms the strongest doubles team ever seen. They are unbeatable. In four years of competition they not only have never lost a match, they have never lost a game. Even by himself, Jacobs is a great doubles player. Two and a half years ago, for instance, he played alone against Ruby and Carl Obert, two nationally ranked players, and whipped them in a 31-point game, taking only one serve to their two. But playing alone in a doubles game is nothing new for Jacobs. In the 1960 USHA doubles final he and his partner, Dick Weisman, had lost the first game and were losing the second 15-3, when Jacobs had Weisman stand in the rear of the court. Jacobs then won the second game and, with Weisman's help, the third.

In Jacobs' younger days—he is now 35—he also competed in other sports. As a teen-ager he played football, baseball and basketball. He was a good enough basketball player to be invited to an Olympic tryout. He ran the 100-yard dash in 9.8, and he was a skeet shot of championship caliber. Then and now his physical and mental abilities are such that professional athletes who know Jacobs well claim he could be a superstar in any sport. Jim Bouton, the Yankee pitcher, flatly says that Jacobs is the best athlete he has ever seen and adds, in moments of exultation, that if Jacobs played big-league ball “he would hit .500.” In calmer moments Bouton merely says that Jacobs would be “the last of the .400 hitters.” Cus D’Amato, the fight manager and a man ordinarily given to a squinty-eyed view of athletes, says that he has met only two men who had the aura of a champion that Jacobs has. Those men were Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson. And Bob Waterfield, the old quarterback who is known to reporters as the Sphinx and the Great Stone Face because he ordinarily never says anything, becomes a gushing chatterbox when it comes to Jacobs, his onetime handball partner. “Jimmy is by far the most coordinated athlete I’ve ever *continued*

seen," says Waterfield. "I don't see how anyone could be better. I've never seen an athlete like him. He is so coordinated it is impossible to tell whether he is left- or right-handed. He could be the best athlete in the world."

Away from handball, Jacobs has achieved a certain amount of standing as a collector of comic books and fight films. He has the largest collections of their kind in the world, and both have fitted into his sporting endeavors. As a youngster, Jacobs got added inspiration in sports by pretending that he was Dick Grayson, alias Robin, the Boy Wonder, combater of crime with Bruce Wayne, millionaire Gotham City playboy, secretly Batman. Today in partnership with Bill Cayton, owner of an advertising agency and a New York TV producer, Jacobs has put out any number of films of famous fights. Their latest offering, *Knockout*, is a brisk compilation of the most savage bouts available on film. As a writer, editor and producer of this and similar fight films, Jacobs earns an impressive annual income. He is in fight films not for the money, however, but because he is simply nuts about boxing. He watches films of old fights by the hour, and he can practically recite the punches thrown in any title bout. While barroom habitués might wrangle forever in argument over who was the greatest heavyweight champion, Jacobs declares for Joe Louis, and he has the films to prove it.

When Norman Mailer, the contentious novelist, first met Jacobs they got into an argument about boxing. Jacobs drubbed him so that Mailer was moved to include an account of their debate in his book, *The Presidential Papers*, where he confessed that Jacobs "ran me all over the court." In turn, *Strength and Health*, the physical culture journal, was so taken with Jacobs' build that it ran a long feature on his muscles and how they got that way.

Jacobs is busy every day, practicing handball or editing film. He leaves absolutely nothing to chance. During political campaigns he writes down the promises of every candidate, and when a politician comes up for reelection Jacobs consults his notes to see how the man has done. Friends and followers beseech Jacobs for advice on all sorts of matters, and his conversations with D'Amato, with whom he shares an apartment in New York, sometimes run very deep. "We discuss my favorite subject, fear," says D'Amato. Jacobs' interest in fear and the role it plays in winning or losing is one of the subjects he covers when giving clinics for the U.S. Handball Association. When Jacobs talks about handball he has overtones of Freud and Von Clausewitz. His listeners lap it up.

Generally, Jacobs is not the sobersides young man this would suggest. He is, in fact, a practical joker of some attainment. When he was living regularly in Los Angeles, his apartment was around the corner from a memory school. He found out the name of the director, and one day he dropped into the school, where he greeted the director with the excited cry, "George, how are you!" Flustered and em-

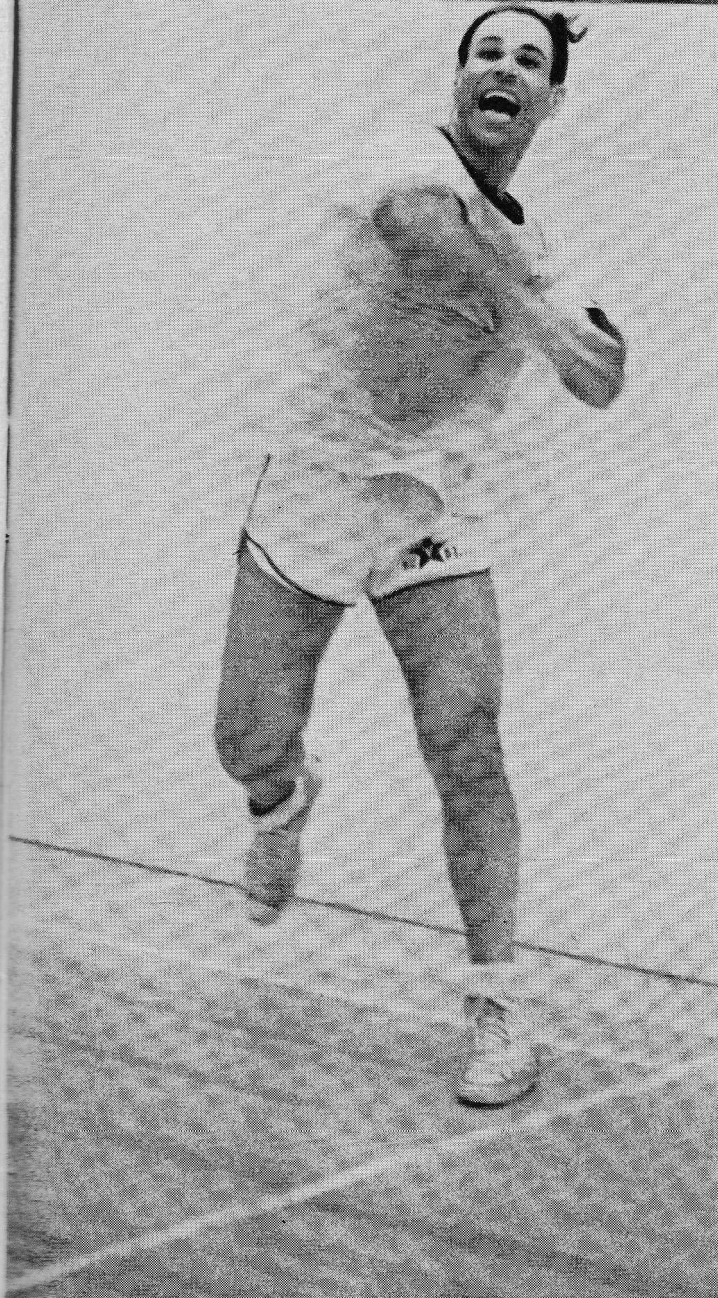
barrassed at being unable to remember Jacobs, the director fumbled for a reply. "George!" Jacobs exclaimed. "You've forgotten!" Then he left.

Once, when Jacobs took a boat to England in search of rare fight films, he signed up for lessons with a steward in the ship's three-wall handball court. He made no mention of his handball experience, and every morning at 10 he presented himself for an hour's instruction. Each day Jacobs permitted his game to improve, and after the last lesson the steward told him, "You're by far the best student I've ever had. For the first time I really feel like a teacher."

As a boy, Jacobs lived largely in his imagination. Born in St. Louis, he moved to Los Angeles with his parents when he was 5. Shortly afterward his parents were divorced, and he was raised by his mother. Always intense, he became the tetherball champion of his grade school. Until the age of 15 he was under the spell of comic books. He bought and devoured hundreds of them, and among his heroes were The Atom, Aquaman, Batman and Robin, of course, Black Hawk, Black-X, Blue Beetle, Boy Commandoes, Captain America, Captain Marvel and on and on through the alphabet. Jacobs was so exhilarated by his heroes that he began acquiring as many as 10 copies of every issue that dealt with their adventures. He read and thumbed one copy and put the other nine aside in glassine envelopes to protect their mint condition. When Jacobs went into the Army he had subscriptions to a couple dozen comic books, but he still asked his mother to buy additional copies at newsstands. The subscription copies came creased in the mail. To the permanent astonishment of his mother, Jacobs keeps an apartment in Los Angeles that is stacked with comic books, but she does not know that he also rents a storage room in a warehouse to hold the bulk of the collection. On a recent visit to L.A., Jacobs spent an afternoon sifting through his comic books, recalling where and under what circumstances he had bought certain memorable issues. Off the top of his head, Jacobs has no difficulty remembering, for instance, that Batman first appeared in issue No. 27 of *Detective Comics* and that Robin happened along in issue No. 38. He is an avid reader of the *80 Pg. Giant Batman* issued now, but he despises the television version of *Batman*. "It's a comedy," he says. "It's something to laugh at, and that hurts me."

The fine points of Batman's and Robin's adventures are so engraved on Jacobs' mind that he was outraged when their initial meeting was redrawn for an issue 15 years later. Instead of meeting with a circus ladder in the background, as was the case in the original episode, Batman and Robin were portrayed in a room. Jacobs was so vexed by this tampering with history that he told other Batman fans to disregard this blatant fraud, and he wrote an angry letter to the publisher.

"You see," Jacobs says, "I always pretended that I was Robin, the Boy Wonder. Superman I admired, but Batman and Robin were human, and everything athletic that Robin did, I tried to do. He threw a boomerang. I learned how



With a triumphant follow-through, Jacobs whips off a shot in his 1965 championship match against Dave Graybill. Jacobs won 21-12, 21-11.

to throw a boomerang. Robin was an excellent tumbler, and so I would run off diving boards to practice double flips. Robin knew jujitsu, so I took lessons. In one issue Robin swam underwater for two minutes. I didn't know if a kid could swim underwater for a minute. So I tried. I learned first that when you swim underwater you use up oxygen. So then I learned how to hold my breath underwater. Before long I could swim underwater for two minutes. I didn't want to admit that Robin could do something I couldn't do. I always envisioned myself as Robin, the Boy Wonder, or else as Dick Grayson, who had to keep himself under wraps. When I did something extraordinary in athletics I would think to myself, 'Well, I took off the wraps just to show what I could do.'

"Being Robin, the Boy Wonder, was a tremendous help to me in sports. All of us are susceptible to our emotions when under stress, and when I was younger I would think: What would Robin do? Instead of succumbing to nervous apprehension, I would transform myself into this other character who was emotionally unaffected."

At Los Angeles High School, Jacobs was rarely eligible for sports because of poor grades, especially in English. He looks back upon his academic career with regret, but at the time he simply was not interested. "He wasn't happy in anything except sports," says his mother. Instead of competing at school, he played halfback in football, shortstop in baseball and forward in basketball for the George Gershwin Chapter of the AZA, a branch of the B'nai B'rith, a national Jewish organization. The competition was keen, because any youngster, regardless of religion, could play. While Jacobs played football, the Gershwin chapter won the AZA championship three years in a row, and one year it won all three major team championships.

At 15, Jacobs had largely given up pretending that he was Robin, the Boy Wonder, and began searching for new mental approaches to victory. He tried various techniques. In the AZA basketball finals one year Jacobs scored on a layup to tie the game just before the buzzer sounded. However, he had been fouled making the shot and was given one free throw. If he made it his team won the championship; if he missed the game went into overtime.

"I asked for a time-out," Jacobs says. "I wanted to know how I was going to conduct myself mentally. The fellows thought I had called time to catch my breath, but I was trying to select which mental image I wanted at the foul line. My coach had once told me that in an important situation on the free-throw line the thing that will destroy you is overconcentration. He always impressed on us that a free throw was easy, and that you should conduct yourself as though you were in practice. So I decided on my mental image in this case. I was going to walk up to the line and shoot the shot just as if it were a warmup, as though the referee said I had one to practice before shooting the real one. I went up to the line, the referee gave me the ball and I made the shot."

When Jacobs was 19 he began playing four-wall handball

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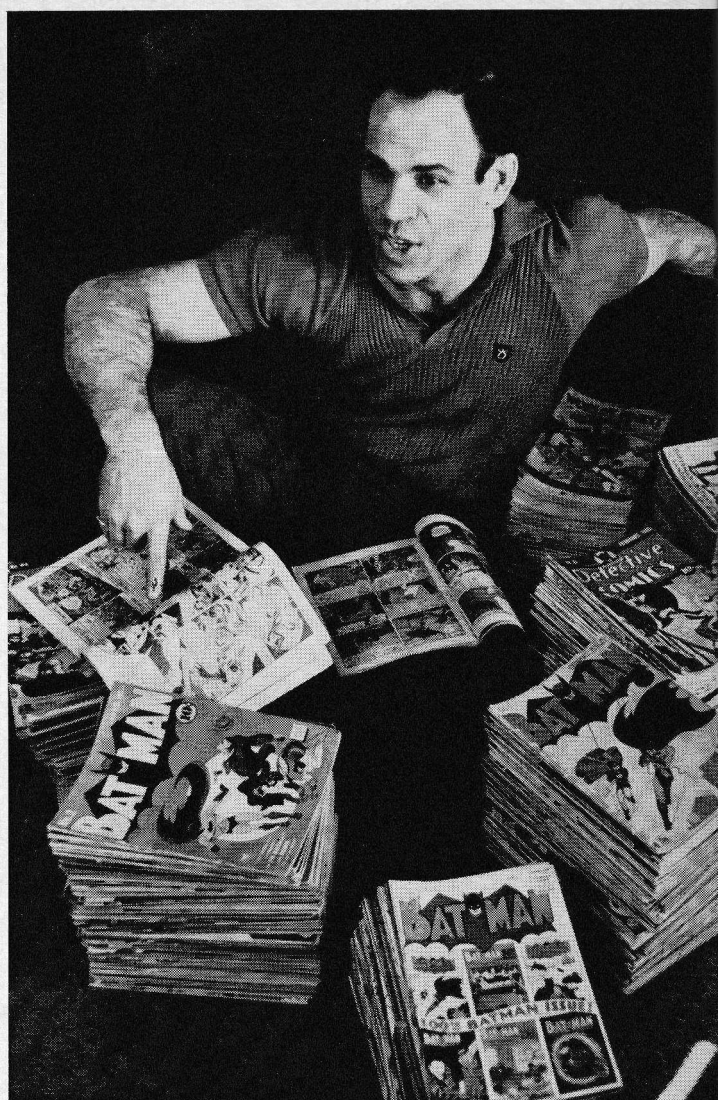
at the Hollywood YMCA. Art Linkletter, the TV master of ceremonies, had been playing the sport at the Y for a number of years, and when Jacobs first started Linkletter had no trouble beating him. But Jacobs was determined to be the best. Since the courts were closed on Sundays, he got in to practice by himself by leaping from the gallery. Naturally right-handed, he spent hours in front of a mirror at home practicing left-hand returns. "I don't know where he got it from," says his mother, "but he has an ungodly amount of drive, enthusiasm and determination."

Whenever Jacobs passed the May Company department store he would stop for five minutes to check his handball form in the reflection of a large window. "People used to think I was kooky," he says. Within several months, however, he had no trouble thrashing Linkletter or anyone else in Los Angeles. Linkletter and several other enthusiasts, sensing that they had a prodigy in their midst, raised a pot and sent Jacobs to the junior nationals in Bremerton, Wash., where he won the singles title. At the time Jacobs was also playing AAU basketball for a printing company, and he was good enough to be invited to try out for the Olympic team. He declined, to concentrate on handball.

While on a trip to Chicago with the basketball team in 1950, Jacobs managed to wangle a singles game against Gus Lewis, the former national champion. Then and now, Chicago is the spiritual capital of handball in the U.S. because of the efforts of Robert Kendler, a multimillionaire home remodeler. Kendler was (and is) so crazy about handball that he had a dozen of the best players in the country working for him, including Lewis, and he had built the Town Club of Chicago as a place for them to practice. After Lewis played Jacobs at the club he called his boss, Kendler, and said, "I've just played a kid who doesn't know what he's doing, and for a kid who doesn't know what he's doing he's a hell of a handball player."

Kendler immediately hired Jacobs as a home remodeling salesman, put him into an apartment with Billy Baier, co-holder of the national doubles title and had him practice at the club with the rest of the handball players in his off hours. "My real schooling was with this group," Jacobs says. "There were 10 to 15 guys I couldn't get 10 points off of, and they all taught me. Gus Lewis taught me about anticipation. Ken Schneider, the national singles champ, taught me a lot about the danger of letting up in a game. Frank Coyle, who had dethroned Joe Platak, one of the top players in the history of the sport, gave me a real lesson. When I was young I hit the ball like a son of a gun. Frank came in. He was much older, and he let his brain and soft play completely neutralize my power. He just brained me to death, and he opened up an area in handball I had never explored."

Jacobs spent a year and a half in Chicago, then he was drafted. He served as a rifleman with the First Cavalry Division in Japan and Korea. In his younger days he used to get involved in fights, and he had the most memorable one of his life in Japan with the company bully. "He was huge,"



In a rare spare moment Jacobs pores over back issues of "Batman." As a youth he pretended he was Robin, the Boy Wonder.

Jacobs says. "But when I saw what kind of a guy he was I had to get him." When the fight was over Jacobs had lost his two front teeth, but the bully spent a month in the hospital with a broken jaw and collarbone. Nowadays Jacobs avoids fights. Not long ago, when he got into an exchange with a motorist in New York, the stranger jumped from his car and offered to punch Jacobs in the mouth. "Gee, mister," Jacobs pleaded, "don't hit me. I've got a heart condition. You might kill me." The stranger was all apologies.

After his discharge, Jacobs returned to Los Angeles, where he worked as a salesman for a business machine company. When he applied for the job he told the owner of the firm, Murray Spivak, that he wanted to be the sales chief. Spivak made him a salesman and, to prove his worth, Jacobs spent the first couple of weeks learning the business and then went out and made 18 sales in one day, topping the company's record. What astounded Spivak was that Jacobs made the sales during a hailstorm. "With the

hail, I couldn't see how he could even make 18 calls," says Spivak. "With his personality, he was perfect for sales."

At the Los Angeles Athletic Club, Jacobs applied himself just as diligently to handball. In 1953 he competed in his first nationals and finished fifth. In 1954 he was third, and in 1955, playing on his home court in L.A., he won the singles, defeating Vic Hershkowitz.

Up until this victory, handball had largely been a power game of kills but Jacobs, having mastered the soft game with ceiling shots, forced Hershkowitz to the rear of the court where he could not make his slambang kills. In handball circles Jacobs' play in this match was as revolutionary to the sport as Dorais' passes to Rockne were to football. Jacobs is the first to admit that Hershkowitz was no longer at his peak when they met—using a boxing analogy, Jacobs likens the match to the Marciano-Louis fight—but most handballers now agree Jacobs has such a complete mastery of the game, from soft stuff to kills, that he would have beaten Hershkowitz at his best.

In 1956 Jacobs again won the national singles, defeating Johnny Sloan of Chicago in the semis and Hershkowitz again in the finals. In 1957, Jacobs beat Sloan again in the semis and Hershkowitz for the third time in the finals. In 1958 he had to forfeit the finals when he was injured in a collision in a doubles match. The next year Jacobs did not play because of a baffling heart condition. Examination finally revealed that he was breathing too deeply and taking too much oxygen into the blood stream, causing his heart to flutter. Now whenever the trouble arises he breathes into a paper bag for a few minutes. In this way he inhales his own carbon dioxide, thus burning up the excess oxygen. (Occasionally, Jacobs also has been troubled by muscle spasms in his back. Two weeks ago he lost to Buzz Shumate in a match at Dallas; a few weeks before he had beaten Shumate, 21-5, 21-2.) In 1960 Jacobs returned to the national singles and beat defending champion Sloan. He withdrew in 1961 because of a torn tendon, and in 1962 and 1963 he passed up the singles to win in the doubles with Decatur. But in 1964, when Decatur got married on the first day of the tournament, Jacobs returned to the singles. He wanted to vanquish Oscar Obert, who had won the championship the previous two years from Johnny Sloan.

Jacobs has a sharp rivalry with Oscar and his brothers, Ruby and Carl, who were the kings of the four-wall courts in New York until Jacobs began working there in 1960. When one of the Oberts plays, his other two brothers and mother and father are usually in the gallery to shout support, and Jacobs loves nothing more than to crush an Obert before the rest of the family.

As per custom, Jacobs trained for the singles by playing practice matches against two opponents simultaneously. He met Oscar in the finals and won easily. "I didn't want people to think I gave up singles because of Oscar Obert," he says with some finality.

Last year Jacobs again entered the singles, and this time he defeated Dave Graybill, who has had a sensational rise in handball after winning a record 11 letters in football, basketball and baseball at Arizona State. What happened in this match was best described by *Ace*, the official magazine of the U.S. Handball Association, which features Jacobs about as often as *Osservatore Romano* quotes the Pope.

"Dave is an all-out, aggressive, offensive-minded player and through his sheer determination, quickness and power has been able to become one of the nation's ranking players," *Ace* reported in an article entitled, "What We Learn from Watching Champions." "But the things he [Graybill] could get away with in competition against some top-drawer performers were his downfall against the complete game . . . of Jim Jacobs." There followed the usual paeans to Jacobs that readers of *Ace* have come to expect.

From time to time, Jacobs travels the country holding clinics for the U.S. Handball Association, which Kendler formed in 1950 after breaking away from the AAU. To the surprise of most players who hear him for the first time, Jacobs does not dote on techniques, such as how to serve, but on what he calls handball concepts.

"Every player is different physically," Jacobs says, "so what is good for one man may be bad for another. Instead of trying to change their swings or serves, I tell them when to go on offense and when to go on defense. There are certain basic rules, and if you violate them and your opponent does not you simply cannot win. For example, never return the ball to the front wall first unless you intend to end the volley on that particular shot, because the ball gets back to the server too quickly. Also, whenever possible, take the ball out of the air to keep your opponent in the backcourt. The man closest to the front wall is the man on the offense. I believe I'm effective because my opponents can't get me out of the front of the court.

"Another concept in handball is to make your opponent hit every ball with his weak arm. If your right hand is your strong arm, it's your right hand that wins games and the left that loses them. Unfortunately, many young players have developed their weak arm to the point where it looks as good as their stronger arm, and if the ball is just a fraction to the left of the middle of the court, they'll hit it with their left arm. In the beginning they might do all right but, after playing an hour or two, the basic weakness of the arm begins to show. But there are players who will continue to play with both hands just to get the oohs and ahs.

"I'm supposed to have arms of equal strength, but I really look upon my right hand, my strong hand, as the sword and the left as the shield. I tell players that when they have a comfortable, convenient choice to use their stronger arm."

Jacobs has no qualms about giving pointers to anyone. "The more powerful I make my competition, the better I'm going to get," he says. "I've always believed that if anyone were physically better than I was in a sport I could make up for it by giving more mental effort. This is where contests

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are won or lost. To me, mental effort is it. When something happens in an athletic contest that you don't understand, when there are tremendous upsets with no justification, the answer is always, *always*, in the mental attitudes of the winning and losing teams or individuals.

"Sports fans always measure everything by what they can see with their eyes, but countless times winning is the result of proper mental application. In practice, for instance, I can make the back-wall kill 10 out of 10 times with either hand. There is no pressure. Now put 500 people in the gallery and a TV camera there, too, and say, 'Do it again, Jim, only this time it's for the world championship.' What is it that changes? *I've* already demonstrated that I can do it. So once I've convinced myself that I can do what has to be done physically, I then have to control my emotions.

"When I go to play in a championship match I meet an old friend I call Mr. Emotion. He is very predictable. When I want to win very badly he comes right into my body. But so that he doesn't interfere with what I'm trying to accomplish, I have to take more time in the service box, I have to make more conscious efforts to give my arms clear instructions. The way I react to Mr. Emotion is not to get apprehensive. He is nothing but a feeling, and he is there to let me know how important this match is to me. He acts as a reminder to me that the application of the physical talent that I have is under the complete dominance of what I call my control system, my brain, and that the orders that come out of this control system have to be very clear and explicit, just as if I were addressing some small child.

All handball players look upon themselves as one identity trying to beat an opponent, but this couldn't be farther from the truth. I have a doubles team right here in my two hands. Each member of this team has assets and liabilities. The control system knows where the strengths and weaknesses of these two hands, Mr. Right and Mr. Left, lie. I expect each one of these hands to show a consideration to the other just like members of a real doubles team do. The only difference between a doubles team and these two gentlemen is that these two hands have one control system, and a doubles team has two control systems. My right hand expects Mr. Left to protect him and never allow any setups. If Mr. Left makes an error and sets up a shot that loses the volley, the control system up here in my brain will always make the necessary corrections so Mr. Left doesn't lose the game before Mr. Right can win it. If Mr. Left does his part and shields Mr. Right, then Mr. Left expects Mr. Right to win the match for him.

"In a game the personalities of the two hands are completely different. Mr. Left is disturbed very easily because he's mechanical, and if he makes a good shot during play, in my mind, I'll compliment him. I'll say, 'That's it! Beauty!' Never out loud, of course. I never permit anyone to know what's going on inside my control system."

Jacobs' control over his control system is so complete

that he likes, in his words, "to plan an important match as though I were a Hollywood writer, and then have it come out that way. When I plan, I don't worry whether I am going to win or not, but I plan *how* I'm going to win, meaning the type of play I'm going to employ in order to get the desired result."

If a match is not going the way Jacobs scripted it—and this does not necessarily mean that he is behind—he asks for a time-out so he can summon up the appropriate mental image to get his game going. Instead of becoming Robin, the Boy Wonder, Jacobs now thinks of athletes under stress who persevered. This may be Archie Moore, Sandy Koufax or anyone else who has withstood tremendous pressure.

Ordinarily, Jacobs does not discuss his mental processes at length with other athletes—"They'd think I was a little berserk," he says—but he talks about them for hours on end with D'Amato. D'Amato has long been intrigued by the workings of the mind under stress in sports, and he says of Jacobs, "Jimmy is one of the few people who have a good grasp of fear. Like me, he feels that fear is necessary for the success of an athlete. This pressure that all athletes are subjected to prior to competition is a necessary and natural part of competing, and Jimmy understands it as nature's way of preparing him for that which he must do. Jimmy doesn't allow fear to intimidate him. *He uses it.* It makes him aware. Jimmy makes a complete analysis of what needs to be done in a game, and then he fits himself into the requirements, and his ability to do this reflects tremendous determination on his part. The more I studied this guy, the more impressed I became. He is extraordinary. He not only has an excellent mind, but a tremendous physique and stamina. I have never met an athlete like him."

As a youngster in L.A., Jacobs was always fascinated by boxing, and when he was 14 he bought his first film of a fight, the first Louis-Walcott bout, to find out who really won. After giving the decision to Walcott, Jacobs began acquiring films of other fights. He bought and traded films with collectors and museums around the world. Many films had never been seen before; they had lain in pictorial limbo for years because federal law from 1912 to 1940 prohibited the interstate shipment of fight films. The law had been passed as a result of the race riots that took place all over the country after Jack Johnson beat Jim Jeffries.

In addition to obtaining films, Jacobs also began acquiring the legal rights to show them for exhibition purposes. Whenever he traveled to give clinics for USHA, he prefaced his remarks by telling the gallery of his interest in fight films and asking for leads. After one clinic at the Multnomah Athletic Club in Portland, Ore., an elderly man told Jacobs that he had a copy of a very old film. Jacobs agreed to see it, and the man brought out a shoe box containing the 32-mm. print of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons heavyweight championship at Carson City in 1897. This was the first heavyweight title bout ever photographed by motion-picture cameras—it was also the fight in which Fitzsimmons introduced his solar-plexus punch—and all copies supposedly

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had vanished. In fact, the print Jacobs saw was so fragile it threatened to crumble to the touch. Jacobs made a deal for it and sent the print to a lab where it was softened and a negative print made.

In 1959 a collector in Australia wrote Jacobs that he had a copy of the Johnson-Willard fight film. No other copy was known, and the price was \$5,000. Jacobs got in touch with Bill Cayton in New York, who was the producer of a TV series, *Greatest Fights of the Century*, and Cayton agreed to advance the money. Jacobs flew to Australia, inspected the film and bought it. He took it to New York where he agreed to pool his collection with Cayton's and go into business with him.

Cayton and Jacobs now have three production companies: Greatest Fights of the Century, Inc., which is preparing a brand-new series with 90 fights never before shown on TV, including the Johnson-Burns bout; Big Fights, Inc., which produces mostly TV previews of heavyweight championship fights; and Knockout, Inc., which produced *Knockout*. Jacobs is also working on another motion-picture feature, a history of the heavyweight championship from Corbett to Clay. As Jacobs sees it, the film will include not only clips from championship fights themselves but human-interest footage showing fighters away from the ring, such as Max Baer clowning on the beach and Jack Dempsey getting beat up by Charlie Chaplin.

"This will be the greatest thing I've ever done," says Jacobs with a Hollywood flair. "It will be sensational, and the thing that will make it unique is not the fights, but the pictures away from the ring. By the time the challenger and champion walk into the ring, you'll know what kind of people they are." Jacobs is halfway through the picture, which will take him two years to complete.

"Jimmy's supremacy over the rest of the world in fight films is greater than his supremacy in handball," says Cayton. "In handball there are players half as good, but in fight films there is no one a tenth as good."

D'Amato and Jacobs first met in 1960

because of their mutual interest in boxing. D'Amato had long contended that most oldtime fighters of the pre-World War I era were bums, and Jacobs agreed. Nowadays, the two of them often spend hours shaking their heads over the likes of Stanley Ketchel and Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, and Jacobs occasionally irritates oldtime fans by noting the inadequacies of their heroes in articles he writes for *The Ring Magazine*.

"I have seen every fighter from Corbett to Clay under the Marquess of Queensberry Rules," he says, "and when some guy 93 years old tells me he also has seen Corbett and Clay the difference is that I don't have to use my memory to go back 69 years. I'm talking about fighters I saw on the screen last night."

While Jacobs' selection of Louis as the best heavyweight champion ever is not particularly surprising, his choice of the most underrated fighter of all time is. He is Jimmy Bivins, a heavyweight campaigner of the '40s. As for Cassius Clay, Jacobs says, "He's not 'the greatest,' but he's a wonderful fighter, and it would take the greatest to handle him. His strong point is his tremendous hand and leg speed, tremendous especially for a man who is 6 feet 3 and weighs 215 pounds. His confidence is intimidating to the people he fights. But the thing that eventually will hurt him is that he is overconfident. And this, when everything else is equal, is the deciding factor in a contest. When he does lose, it will be a startling loss to someone he and everybody else underestimated."

In Jacobs' opinion, the best fighter, regardless of weight division, was Sugar Ray Robinson. Jacobs has a film of Robinson boxing a 6-foot featherweight in the 1939 Golden Gloves. With the eye of an unrivaled connoisseur, Jacobs proclaims the sixth Robinson-LaMotta fight as the finest match he has ever seen and, in his opinion, the first Marciano-Walcott fight was the most thrilling heavyweight bout. As might be expected of a man of Jacobs' acumen, he knows styles backward, and he is able to spot flaws in the styles of fighters working these days. On occasion, he will tell one what he is doing wrong. The fighter usually pays no attention.

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