

FIRST DRAFT

Heavyweight champ had links to much of western Colorado

In Montrose in the summer of 1912, a 17-year-old fighter who called himself Kid Blackie knocked down his friend and boxing opponent Fred Wood to win his first sort of professional fight. He split the \$40 purse with Wood.

Seven years later, Kid Blackie had a different nickname, the Manassa Mauler, and a new title: heavyweight champion of the world.

On July 4, 1919, 24-year-old William Harrison "Jack" Dempsey destroyed the reigning champion, giant Jess Willard in Toledo, Ohio. Willard surrendered after three rounds.

Although Dempsey was some 50 pounds lighter than Willard and several inches shorter, he "snapped Willard's jaw, pried loose six teeth, broke his cheekbone, squashed his nose, (and) closed one eye," wrote author Toby Smith.

Few boxing fans had ever seen someone punch as hard as Dempsey did against Willard. Afterward, writer Damon Runyon dubbed Dempsey the Manassa Mauler, combining Dempsey's fighting style with his birthplace in the San Luis Valley.

However, a number of Colorado communities share in Dempsey's legacy.

Montrose played an important role beyond the 1912 fight. The Dempsey family spent several years there when the Gunnison Tunnel irrigation project was being built.

Dempsey's mother, Celia, operated a restaurant for the tunnel workers until 1909. The future fighter helped wash dishes and bus tables.

But the Dempsey family moved a lot, and records of when and where they lived are not always clear.

Smith reported they moved to Delta in mid-1907. However, the Delta County Historical Society has records showing that Dempsey's father, Hyrum, worked at the Delta Brick and Tile Factory in 1905.

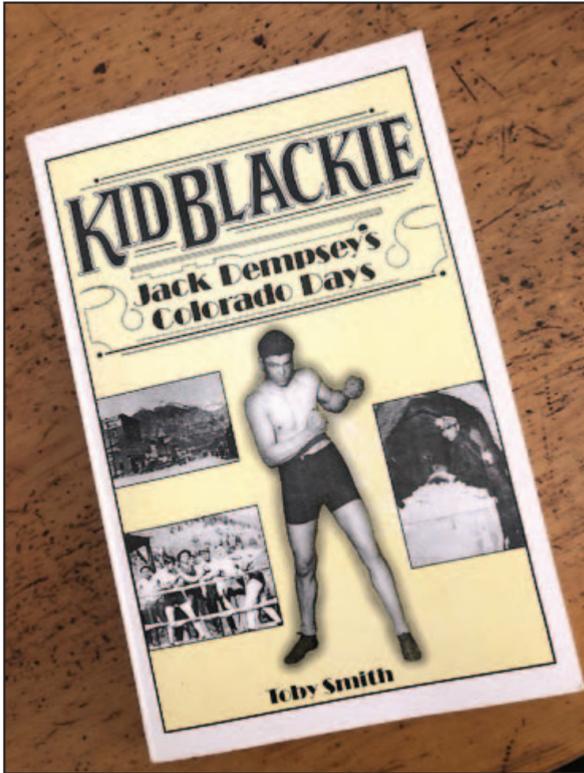
Other dates in Dempsey's young life are also disputed. Originally from West Virginia, Celia and Hyrum Dempsey arrived in Manassa before the turn of the century, but left in 1903 or 1904.

They moved first to Creede, where Celia worked in a boarding house, then Leadville, where she became ill. After a brief stint in Denver, it was back to the Western Slope, first to Wolcott, then Steamboat Springs, Rifle, on to a ranch south of Montrose, and finally to Montrose.

Where ever they lived, young Dempsey fought because boxing was a popular activity for poor youngsters.

Encouraged by his mother, the boy then known as Harry decided he would become a champion one day.

After Montrose, Hyrum moved the family to Lakeview, Utah, where Dempsey gradu-



Author and journalist Toby Smith detailed Jack Dempsey's early years in Colorado in his 1983 book, "Kid Blackie."



Jack Dempsey as world heavyweight champion.

ated from elementary School in 1911, just before his 16th birthday.

Soon afterward he began riding the rails, mostly to towns in Colorado, where he found work as a miner or ranch hand, anything to obtain food.

He also boxed. One friend estimated Dempsey fought 450 bouts in the saloons, hotels and bordellos of Colorado and Utah. Most fights were just for meals or a few dollars.

Often, Dempsey said, he would walk into a saloon and offer to fight any takers for a dollar.

Dempsey began to develop his boxing skills then. He learned to duck and weave, to hit with both fists, to observe his opponents and fight to their weaknesses.

He developed a reputation as a tough brawler, though peaceful outside the ring.

He learned from his older brother, Bernie, a not-very-successful professional fighter. Bernie sometimes called himself "Jack" Dempsey, and his younger brother appropriated

that name.

The teenage Dempsey also learned pugilistic technique from friends Pat and Andy Malloy in Telluride, where Dempsey worked as a miner. He fought multiple fights there and in towns from Gunnison to Salida to the Front Range.

He defeated a local champion in Cripple Creek in 1913. He is believed to have fought at the Park Opera House in Grand Junction, but the date and name of his opponent are unknown.

A 1915 exhibition in Durango, in which he knocked his buddy Andy Malloy down multiple times, is pictured in a mural on the wall of the El Rancho Lounge in Durango.

That same year, Dempsey attacked four men at the Grand Junction Hotel and Lunch Counter after he recognized them as a crew of thugs that had earlier robbed Dempsey and a Denver reporter at gunpoint.

The reporter described Dempsey as "a destructive dervish" who easily dispatched the four robbers and recovered the stolen money.

In 1916, Dempsey was lured to New York by a fight promoter, but the trip was a disaster. He lost multiple bouts to experienced boxers and was bilked out of his meager share of purses.

In 1917, he fought Pueblo's Fireman Jim Flynn, an experienced heavyweight with a national reputation. Dempsey lost by a technical knockout in the first round, but in a rematch a year later, Dempsey knocked Flynn out in the first round.

By then, Dempsey had spent almost a year in Oakland, California, with manager Jack Kearns. He had a succession of victories over recognized

boxers, including seven knockouts in a row. He established a reputation that allowed him to challenge Willard for a title in 1919.

Dempsey held the heavyweight crown for more than seven years, and throughout the 1920s, he and Babe Ruth were the two best known U.S. sports figures.

While Ruth earned \$80,000 a year at his peak, Dempsey made almost four times that in one fight. His bouts produced the first million-dollar gates in boxing history.

In 1920, Dempsey's ex-wife, a dance hall girl from Utah, accused him of dodging the draft in World War I.

He was exonerated when it was proved he had legally obtained an exemption as the sole breadwinner for his family. Still, the epithet "slacker" dogged him for years.

One of his best-remembered title defenses came in 1923, when he was knocked out of the ring by Argentinian Louis Firpo.

He was pushed back by sportswriters, returned to the ring and KO'd Firpo in the second round.

His most famous fights were two losses to Gene Tunney, first in a 10-round decision in 1926, then in a famous rematch in 1927 with what became known as "the long count."

Dempsey knocked Tunney down hard in the seventh round of the 1927 fight, but didn't retreat to a neutral corner. Tunney laid on the canvas for nearly 15 seconds while the ref waved Dempsey away.

Then Tunney got up and won another decision.

Dempsey never regained his title, but he remained a popular ex-champion. Soon after the Tunney fight, he gave up his professional career but continued to stage exhibition fights.

Eventually, he opened a restaurant in New York City, where he held court and greeted customers well into the 1970s.

Dempsey returned to Colorado several times. He made stops in Denver and was inducted into Colorado's Sports Hall of Fame in 1965.

He went fishing in Gunnison. He traveled to Manassa in the early 1960s to dedicate his boyhood home as a museum.

Kid Blackie, aka the Manassa Mauler, aka William Harrison "Jack" Dempsey, died in New York in 1983, age 87.

Sources: "Jack Dempsey," by Jim Wetzel, Delta County Historical Society newsletter, April, 2019; "Kid Blackie: Jack Dempsey's Colorado Days," by Toby Smith; "A Flame of Pure Fire: Jack Dempsey and the Roaring '20s," by Roger Kahn. "Ex-boxing Champion Dempsey Dies at 87," by Shirley Povich, The Washington Post, June 1, 1983.

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Motorcyclist dies at race he won 4 times

COLORADO SPRINGS — A prominent motorcycle racer died after he crashed near the finish line of a race he had won four times. Carlin Dunne died Sunday at the 97th Broadmoor Pikes Peak International Hill Climb, officials said.

Dunne, who is from Santa Barbara, California, crashed his 2019 Ducati Streetfighter V4 Prototype near the finish line.

An ambulance was dispatched to the finish area after the crash. A reporter witnessed bike shrapnel going over the right edge of the road about 20 yards from the finish line.

Throughout the morning, riders had trouble with a small hump in the road near the summit. Multiple witnesses said they believed Dunne hit the bump at a high speed, which caused his front wheel to spin out. It was the seventh death associated with the Hill Climb.

— The Associated Press

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Loma resident accused of sexually assaulting a minor

By ALEX ZORN
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Loma resident Sean Patrick Cohee, 27, is accused of sexual assault, unlawful sexual contact, second degree kidnapping and other charges, in a case stemming from September last year.

Cohee was in court on Friday as prosecutors called for a high bond, saying the suspect was a flight risk.

The defense countered that because Cohee was married with five children he wasn't a

flight risk.

The judge ruled for a \$50,000 cash-only bond and that Cohee not have contact with any children under 18, other than his children and stepchildren.

Cohee is accused of sexual assault involving a 16-year-old in early September last year.

The incident allegedly took place after Cohee, his wife, and several guests were playing drinking games late into the night.

After Cohee's wife and two of the other guests went to bed, the victim allegedly said Cohee

attempted to "stick his hand up her shirt" after the two spent several more hours talking to each other, according to an interview she had with detectives days later.

Cohee allegedly took her downstairs to a couch where she was sexually assaulted, the arrest affidavit states.

The victim then woke up one of her friends, who was one of the guests at the house at the time, and immediately asked that they leave, she said.

The next day the victim un-

derwent a sexual assault exam.

Included in the exam, the medical examiner noted abrasions and bruises to the victim's arms, legs and a bruise on the top of her left foot.

The victim claimed that Cohee "grabbed her by the arm and pulled her down the stairs" that night. "(She) hit her foot on the corner of the wall as he was dragging her down the stairs and hit her shin as they were going past the washer and dryer."

Cohee is scheduled to be back in court July 5.

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