

Edwin Ackerly, Olympic Champion, Named To Hall Of Fame

The following stories appeared in the Cuba Patriot in the summer and fall of 1920. Many parts are first person accounts of Ed Ackerly's own experiences in the Olympic games at Antwerp, Belgium. His recent election to the Helms Foundation Wrestling Hall of Fame, sent us scurrying to our files, where we found this story which is as exciting today as it must have been to Cuba Patriot readers back in 1920.

Cuba Boy Champion

Edwin Ackerly will Represent United States in Wrestling Match at Olympic Games

Cuba has been very emphatically put on the athletic map of the United States and the world by the result of the contests held in New York this week to pick the representatives of this country in the Olympic games to be held at Antwerp, Belgium, this fall. In those trials Edwin Ackerly, son of Cashier C. A. Ackerly of the Cuba National Bank, on Wednesday won first place in the 121 pound wrestling contest. To do so he had to defeat representatives of the leading colleges of the East as well as strong competition brought clear from the Pacific coast.

The victory means that Edwin will be taken to the games at Antwerp as a member of the American team, with all expenses paid, and with a very liberal allowance besides. The Olympic is really the big amateur athletic event of the world, and the winner thereof is the world's champion. So that the Cuba boy may hold world laurels as well as national ones.

Edwin is a student at Cornell and is captain of the wrestling team. He won the intercollegiate championship with other university entries during the past season and attained the big "C" as a result.

In the Preliminary match Edwin slightly sprained his ankle, but it is expected to be as good as ever in a short time.

Cuba Patriot,
Friday, July 16, 1920

A Voyage To Antwerp

Edwin Ackerly Writes Of Trip To Olympic Games—Meets Famous Athletes—His Lane Ankle

Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Ackerly this week received a very interesting letter from their son Edwin, describing his trip to Antwerp with the group of athletes who represent the United States in the Olympic games. It is written on board the steamship Princess Matoika, a

rather small boat, so crowded that many of the boys slept in bunks in the hold.

Before the party left New York they marched in column across the city through a crowd of curious spectators. They appeared at the Manhattan Opera House, which was packed with an enthusiastic crowd. "As each Man's name was read," says the writer, "he rose and bowed to the thunderous applause." A picture of the group on the stage appeared in the Sunday papers.

On shipboard the athletes were provided with a track for runners, a tank for swimmers, and mats for the wrestlers. The condition of Mr. Ackerly's ankle, which was injured before he started on the voyage, prevented him from taking part in the workouts, however.

Among the big track men and other athletes with whom the writer became acquainted were Joey Ray, Sol Butler, John Symonds, Langers, and others. He also speaks of Gerson, one of the wrestling team, who, he says, "is in fine condition and just yesterday threw the 175 pound 'champ' all over the mat. . . I don't think I will have to wrestle him though," he adds, "unless it should come down to the world's championship. . . . From all reports there are a number of good men entered in 121, including a couple of Greek champions. These Greeks seem to be natural wrestlers. Metropolis, the Gary, Ind., man who won out in the 135 in the tryouts, is certainly a wonder." He describes seeing him defeat Franz, a 154 pounder, and intercollegiate champ. "I hope," he adds, "that these Greeks whom we'll run across in 121 are not like Metropolis."

There were entertainments every night during the voyage, one of which was a good vaudeville show, some of the team who appeared being professional actors when not in training.

The trip lasted twelve days and there was considerable dissatisfaction with the Olympic executive committee, which had provided but poor accommodations on shipboard not to mention the inadequacy of Fort Slocum as a training place. Before landing the team took action by which it was hoped to get better conditions in Antwerp, and at any rate set a precedent for future Olympic teams. The writer concludes his letter by reporting that his ankle is steadily improving and "will not hurt me much if I don't hurt it again."

Cuba Patriot,
Friday, August 27, 1920



Ed Ackerly as he appeared in 1920

Edwin Ackerly Writes Of Winning Championship

Owing to the courtesy of Mr. Charles Ackerly we are able to print extracts from two very interesting letters received from the young world's champion who won the featherweight wrestling contest at the recent Olympic games at Antwerp.

In the first letter, dated August 27, the writer describes the place where the wrestling took place. This is not at the stadium where the games are held but "in a large building near the center of the town. . . . In the middle of an immense room is the platform containing the mat. All around it are rows upon rows of seats, and above are three galleries extending almost to the roof and nearly around the whole room, so that it is like a great inside bowl with the mat in the center. Directly over the mat is a huge light and when the bout starts all the other lights are turned out, leaving just the one to illuminate the wrestlers. It makes a beautiful sight with the light shining down on the glistening white bodies and black tights." He remarks that the referees have shown some prejudice against the Americans in the boxing and that this is one of the biggest obstacles in the path of victory.

This letter was written before the wrestling matches took place. In the next, dated August 27, they are over and the young wearer of the laurel very modestly describes his triumph. "You see, Gerson and I, as before in New York, had fought our way into the finals. It was between him and me for first place, only this time it was for the featherweight championship of the world. He had beaten a Finn, a Frenchman and a clever Hindu, and I had trimmed a Greek champion and a Swiss champion. All the other men had been eliminated by the fellows whom we defeated. So Gerson and I faced each other again and I hope for the last time." (In Mr. Ackerly's letter written on shipboard he had remarked that Gerson was a very formidable antagonist, no doubt more than his match, but that there was only a remote chance of meeting him as that could only happen in case the two should defeat the rest of the world's wrestlers of their class.)

"The championship was to be decided in three ten minute bouts with an interval between each. Eight o'clock came at last after an agony of waiting, and we climbed through the ropes into the glare of the lights, before an immense crowd. Gerson was more nervous than I. He had been unable to eat any supper while I downed four eggs without any trouble. But nevertheless as we faced each other across that ring and realized what was at stake, it would take a brazen liar to say that either of us wasn't shaking inside. The gong sounded and we closed. I was after him from the start knowing that his game was to stay on his feet while my best chance was on the mat. . . . I figured I had the bout won on aggressiveness, but after it was over the decision was given to him. . . .

"When the second bout started I was much calmer. In less than a minute I made a grab for a headhold and went underneath as I had figured I would. For several long minutes, Gerson, by frantic work, held me down. Suddenly I spun and landed on top and now I was working with the strength of desperation to hold him and to throw him. He almost got up but I crushed him down and flopped him over on his back for an instant, but not quite long enough for a fall. As he broke out of it he stood up and we remained on our feet for a couple of minutes, to the end. As they gave me the decision, for aggressiveness and a fall imminent, I bounded back to the dressing rooms, my heart pounding this time with hope. I believed now that I could win, but it was still an agony of suspense.

"At last came the third and final round. I went down underneath again, the same as I did in the second bout, but Gerson was afraid to come down on the mat with me. He fought shy and deliberately refused to stay on top, preferring to jump back on his feet. I remained on my knees and hobbling along in this fashion, I chased him around the mats to the great amusement of the crowd. It was absolutely new stuff for me, but I knew it was my only chance to win. Then I did something which in all my wrestling experience I never tried before. From a

knees I dove straight at Gerson's left foot. I held it firmly in both hands, and leaping to my feet raised that foot and leg high above Gerson's head. With my leg I tripped his other one out from under and down he came with me on top. He got away before long and I'll be darned if I didn't repeat the performance exactly as at first. A second time he got away and I was still on my knees, while he was standing above me, pushing me away. For the third and last time I dove for his foot and as he crashed down I held his two legs under my arms and forced his shoulders squarely on the mat. Schultz, the navy coach, who was refereeing called the fall, and it was all over before I could fully comprehend what had happened. I was led to the center of the ring and pronounced the champion, made a little bow to the applause and disappeared to the dressing rooms through a crowd of my closest friends who pounced on me as I passed."

The champion remarks that Gerson is really the hardest man he has ever met in the featherweight or 125 pound class, and says that he is a poor sport and willing to do anything to win. Mr. Ackerly's happiness over his own triumph was only marred by the circumstance that his friend, Nat Pendleton, who was picked as a sure winner in the heavyweight class, lost to a Swiss. He won the first bout but, it is claimed, was robbed of the second by the decision, and really lost the third. "It made me feel rather bad," the writer concludes, "that I was the only one to come through."

Cuba Patriot,
Friday, September 17, 1920

Was A Proud Day For Cuba Folks

Greeted World Champion On His Return from Olympic Games

An Impromptu celebration for Young Man Who Put Cuba on Map by Winning Featherweight Wrestling Contest at Antwerp—Mr. Leggett Makes Welcoming Speech

It was not known until shortly before train time that Edwin Ackerly, the winner of the featherweight contest at the Olympic games at Antwerp, was to arrive home on Erie train seven, Monday. The news soon spread, however, and the town soon blossomed out with flags. Plans for a celebration were quickly improvised; the band assembled, the school children marched in a body to the station, and a crowd followed in cars or on foot. Even the train seemed to have caught the athletic contagion and broke another record by arriving almost on time. As the young man alighted the band played, the excited voices of the schoolboys led the cheering, while all the porters beamed and even the colored cooks leaned out of the train to see what could be happening in Cuba.

While his boy admirers relieved their enthusiasm by ringing the church bells and blowing automobile horns, the young champion was proudly escorted to the main square, where the Hon. J. C. Leggett made a few graceful remarks expressing the pride of the friends and fellow-citizens of the young man in his remarkable achievement when, in spite of a sprained ankle he had won the wrestling trophy, being the only American victor in this sport.

The young athlete has received a decoration from no less a personage than King Albert, and though he wears his laurels lightly is doubtless accustomed to applause; yet it was plain that he was much pleased with the home-ly ovation of his townfolk. Perhaps he felt like a dough-boy who has received a croix da guerre and been kissed by a French general in front of the whole army; but in spite of this, he bravely replied with a neat little speech, in which he thanked everybody for the pleasant surprise they had prepared for him, and said that he had been proud to represent Cuba at Antwerp. After this the impromptu celebration came to an end.

The Chamber of Commerce gave a reception and dancing party for Mr. Ackerly on Thursday evening at Keller hall.

Cuba Patriot,
Friday, September 24, 1920

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