

Out of Darkness

The Story of Catch

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Part 11: The Higginshaw Grounds Championship



James (John) Massey

William Schora's ownership of the Snipe Gold Cup wasn't the end of the story. Mr. Joseph Chadwick proprietor of Higginshaw Grounds at Oldham, Lancashire purchased the championship trophy from Schora and decided to establish the 9 stones Championship at the Higginshaw Grounds. It took awhile and quite some effort to finally arrange the championship tournament.

On July 29th, 1865, an elimination tournament was held at Higginshaw Grounds. Six noted wrestlers entered. Amongst them were the famous Teddy Lowe (holder of the Copenhagen Grounds Champion Belt), William Schora former holder of the Champion Gold Cup and the new mat star from Bury, David Bentley.

Bentley eliminated the old champion and wrestled Lowe in the great final. Lowe easily won the final throwing his opponent twice in succession (5 minutes and 8 minutes). To keep the Cup Lowe had to defend it for eighteen months. In 1865 Teddy Lowe became

undisputed lightweight champion of Lancashire, the proud holder of both Champion Belt and Gold Cup.

On October 20th 1866 the great title defence against Frank Robinson resulted in a one hour thirty-three minute draw. The wrestlers agreed to meet again on Monday October 22nd. This time Robinson was one pound overweight so Lowe defended his title and expected to keep the Cup. But the proprietor of the grounds, Mr. Chadwick, claimed the two had pre-arranged this and it was nothing but a "sham match." Teddy Lowe was stripped of his title for violation of the fair play principles.

A new champion had to be determined in an elimination tournament with the trophy won and defended in a fair and genuine contest. In 1867 Robinson became the holder of the Copenhagen Grounds Champion Belt, winning the elimination tournament. In 1866-67

Lowe and Robinson wrestled several times without any success to determine the strongest among them. They would remain undefeated during that period of time.

On March 2nd, 1867, an elimination tournament for the Higginshaw Championship Cup took place. Five contenders for the title entered (Teddy Lowe and Frank Robinson were barred from the competition). Among the competitors were famous wrestlers William Schora, David Bentley, and Joseph Acton. The winner was to receive £4, second best £1. In the semi-final Schora beat Acton and met Bentley in the grand final two out of three falls. Bentley won the first fall in 15 minutes, Schora obtained the second in just 4 minutes, the decider was won by Bentley in 10 minutes. David Bentley of Starling near Bury became champion wrestler of Lancashire at 6 score 6 pounds (9 stones). He had to defend his championship for 18 months to make beautiful gold trophy his own property. Shortly after the final match was over Acton challenged the new champion.

On April 20th 1867 David Bentley defended his title against Joseph Acton (2-0, 25 minutes and 10 minutes). Bentley was trained by Lowe, Acton was trained by Schora.

December 7th, 1867 David Bentley defended his title against William Schora (2-0, 22 minutes and 14 minutes). Bentley was trained by Jack Meadowcroft and Schora by Robinson. The course of the match was disrupted by the disgraceful and inappropriate behavior of "trainers," was which almost caused interruption of the match and "guardians of the law" had to take actions to calm everyone involved down.

The title defence against James Massey of Dukinfield was scheduled on February 29th 1868. David Bentley successfully defended his title for one year and he needed to retain it for few more months to become a permanent possessor of the Gold Cup of Lancashire. For Bentley having a draw would be fair enough when Massey needed only victory. That match will be remembered as the most severe contest of the decade. Massey won the contest in the most beautiful manner 2-0 (Bentley first gets behind but after ten minutes struggle Massey got out and succeeded; with a throw time of fifteen minutes and the second throw took twelve minutes, the finisher being a chancery hold – headlock). Massey was the new champion wrestler of Lancashire at 9 stones.

May 1st 1869 title and Massey defended the Gold Cup Championship against David Bentley, former champion, resulted in a title change. Bentley won 2-1 (0-1, 15 minutes, 1-1, 21 minutes disputed "rolling" fall, and 2-1, 5 minutes). Massey issued a challenge and got a title shot on June 26th 1869 but lost it as well 2-0 (13 minutes and 7 minutes).

A title defence against Edwin Bibby was scheduled on May 21st 1870. Bibby was trained by Frank Robinson. Bentley by Henry Counsel. Joseph Acton acted as referee. Bibby won the match and became the new 9 stones champion wrestler of Lancashire (2-0, 10 minutes and 9 minutes). On October 22nd Bibby had to face Bentley again and defend his title. This time Bentley was victorious (2-0, 20 minutes and 15 minutes) and thus regained the championship of Lancashire.

On March 25th 1871 Edwin Bibby defeated David Bentley 2-0 (each fall took 15 minutes) and got his title back. Bentley was trained by Teddy Lowe and Bibby was coached by William Schora. On September 23rd in the same year at Higginshaw Grounds Bibby, whose weight previously had not exceeded 9 stones wrestled Sam Ridley a 14 stones wrestler from Burnley, winning both falls (6 minutes and 12 minutes). During the match spectators, many of whom were betting on the outcome of the play, felt that it was another "sham match" and decided to put an end to it. To prevent that from happening, and in order

to bring peace into the crowds, the referee (like in many other local matches it was Elijah Buckley of Millbottom) had to cancel all the bets, and make wrestlers finish match for stakes (£25 a side).

In November 1871 Edwin Bibby resigned possession of the 6 score 6 pounds (9 stones) Champion Gold Cup of Lancashire which was returned to the proprietor of the grounds Mr. Chadwick. He put it at stake again in the elimination tournament scheduled for December 16th and 18th weight class 5 score 15 pounds (8 stones 3 pounds). Six men entered the tournament and John Lees of Glodwick, John Butterworth of Oldham and J. Schofield of Hollinwood (beat Massey in 10 minutes) made it to the second round of the competition. In decisive rounds Lees beat Schofield (7 minutes) and then Butterworth (3 minutes and 1 minutes) and thus became holder of the Champion Cup.

On January 6th 1872 at Higginshaw Grounds, Oldham, Lees again defeated Butterworth 2-0 (34 minutes and 1 minutes) .

On August 3rd 1872 in a special event at Higginshaw Grounds, veteran wrestler William Schora won a one fall farewell match in 8 minutes 30 seconds at 6 score 3 pounds (8 stone 11 pounds) with young mat star John Lees of Glodwick, who was still holder of the Champion Gold Cup. Schora was trained by Lowe and Lees by Bibby.

On December 21st 1872 a match for the Gold Challenge Cup at 8 stones 3 pounds between J. Lees of Glodwick and John Butterworth of Oldham (aka Dockum) resulted in 1 hour 30 minutes draw and due to approaching darkness and was postponed to Monday, December 23rd, attendance was 4,000 people. John Lees won the match 1-0 (20 minutes) and retained the possession of Gold Cup, Dockum was forced to retire due to exhaustion.

In 1873 it was Mrs Chadwick the proprietress of the grounds who was running the Gold Cup at Higginshaw Grounds, Oldham. A match between Lees and Butterworth was scheduled on April 26th 1873 but the match didn't happen.

James Massey challenged John Lees for the Gold Cup and the two wrestled on May 31st , Lees defended his title being an easy victor (2-0, 9 1/2 minutes and 4 minutes) . The winner had to defend his trophy against all comers till June 18th 1873 when it would become his own private property. After that victory witnessed by 3,000 spectators John Lees became the owner of Gold Cup of Lancashire and retired the 5 score 15 pounds (8 stones 3 pounds) Championship of Higginshaw Grounds.

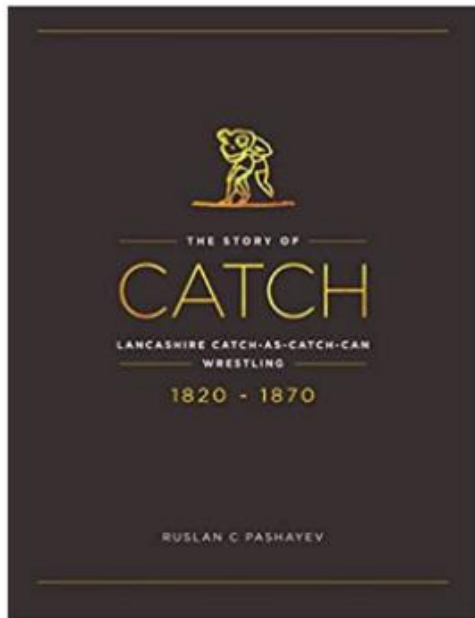
With the retirement of the Gold Cup of Lancashire the Era of "Challenge Trophies" was over. The Lancashire Gold Cup will remain the symbol of the Golden Era, as the most precious and prestigious trophy ever awarded to a catch-as-catch-can wrestler.

**The names of champions in chronological order:
8 stones 11 pounds Championship at Snipe Inn Grounds
1862-1864 William Schora of Ashton-under-Lyne**

**126lb Championship at Higginshaw Grounds
1865-1866 Teddy Lowe of Whitworth
1867-1868 David Bentley of Starling
1868 James Massey of Ashton-under-Lyne
1869 David Bentley of Starling
1870 Edwin Bibby of Ashton-under-Lyne**

1870 David Bentley of Starling
1871 Edwin Bibby of Ashton-under-Lyne

8 stones 3 pounds Championship at Higginshaw Grounds
1871-1873 John Lees of Glodwick



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The Story of Catch: The Story of Lancashire Catch-as-catch-can Wrestling.

FIRST FIFTY YEARS 1820-1870. by Ruslan C Pashayev

The Birth and Evolution of Catch-as-Catch-Can Pro-Wrestling in East Lancashire, England. "The Story of Catch" covers the most forgotten stages of Lancashire's Catch Wrestling history, including its origin, its fast growth and evolution during first fifty years of Catch, introduction of professionalism and its Golden Era, as well as introduction and popularization of it in the United States. This story has many heroes who affected Catch in its early stages and remained in history as true symbols of Lancashire Wrestling. But the whole story is dedicated to the memory of Adam Ridings of Bury, Lancs (1819-1894), who was also known under the nickname of "Dockum of Bury" a pioneer of Catch Wrestling, and the most prominent and popular wrestler of Lancashire in the 1840's-1850's. For anyone with a serious interest in history of professional wrestling "The Story of Catch" is a must.

Research mainly at British Newspaper Archive.

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