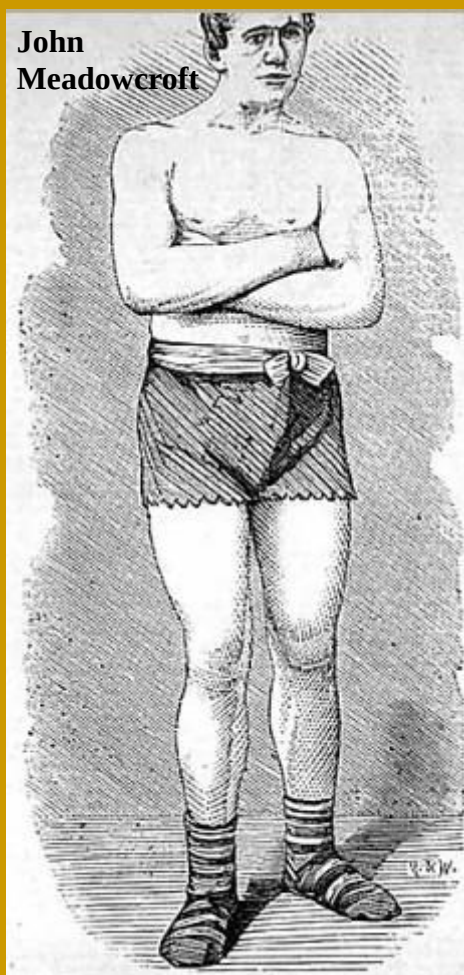


Out of Darkness

The Story of Catch

Ruslan Pashayev

Part 8: The Copenhagen Grounds



John Meadowcroft

As stated previously champion wrestlers of the 1860s Golden Era owed their popularity and success to promoters. A good promoter could make a “champion” out of any wrestler whom he wanted to become a champion.

Promoters weren't susceptible to double-crosses since each venue had it's own unique title based on weight classes. The Copenhagen Grounds title was 9 stones and Snipe Inn 8 stones 11 pounds. Practically it's the same but not quite which is how Lancashire had two champions at the same weight, and it was considered totally fine.

Here's the storyline of the 1861-1867 Copenhagen Grounds Title which was the first official wrestling championship (promotion) in the history of Lancashire catch-as-catch-can, information is based on the sporting news articles from the contemporary British newspapers.

The Copenhagen Grounds 9 stone Wrestling Championship was founded by the proprietor of the grounds at Newton Heath, Manchester – Mr. Thomas Hayes (1826-1894), who in his early years years was an amateur sportsman himself, a pedestrian (1). Thomas Hayes promoted different sports mainly

pedestrianism and wrestling in the traditional Lancashire style (also known under the name of Catch-as-Catch-Can). The 9 stone Championship of the Lancashire County was the first official title in Lancashire wrestling. The jeweler William Preston of Clerkenwell, London, manufactured the beautiful championship trophy emblematic of that title – Champion's Belt, valued at 50 guineas (£52.50).

On January 21st, 1861 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe won a two-day elimination tournament by defeating William Schora of Ashton in the grand final 2-0 and became the first champion wrestler. He was presented with the Champion Wrestler Belt and prize of £5. The conditions of the championship were that the winner should defend his title for twelve months to make the belt his own property.

Later in the same year, on April 6th John Meadowcroft lost his title and belt to Thomas Haigh (Hague) of Ashton 1-2, (0-1, 4 minutes; 1-1, 10 minutes; 1-2, 15 minutes) who became the new champion.

On June 8th, 1861 William Schora of Ashton defeated Thomas Haigh 2-0 (1-0, 6 minutes; 2-0, 2 minutes) and became the champion wrestler. In December of the same year the benefit for the champion wrestler John Cross was scheduled at Salford Borough Gardens and Schora's belt as well as trophies of other local wrestling champions were put on exhibition for public views.

At the beginning of 1862 it was William Schora of Ashton who was Copenhagen Grounds champion wrestler of Lancashire and holder of the trophy. In 1862 the title changed hands several times.

On March 22nd 1862 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe defeated William Schora of Ashton 2-0 (1-0, 43 minutes; 2-0, 20 minutes) for the title and belt.

The title defence against Joseph Acton of Hurst, near Ashton was fixed on July 19th 1862 but became void on June 23rd 1862 due to John Meadowcroft not fulfilling the agreement. Meadowcroft was stripped of his title and the belt was presented to Acton, the new champion wrestler of Lancashire.

The title defence was fixed on August 16th 1862, Acton defeated Meadowcroft 2-0 (1-0 28 minutes; 2-0, 11 minutes) for the belt.

On October 11th 1862 there was an exhibition of the local sporting celebrities' championship trophies at City Grounds, Bradford (Manchester) where Joseph Acton and William Schora (holder of the Snipe Inn Gold Cup) exhibited their trophies.

The title defence was fixed on November 15th 1862 against Joseph Bentley of Oldham. Match was cancelled due to Bentley being overweight, leaving Joseph Acton still champion wrestler of Lancashire.

In November 1862 John Meadowcroft challenged champion Joseph Acton to wrestle for the title and belt. Acton declined the challenge and was stripped of the title. By November 30th 1862 the belt was presented to Meadowcroft who became the new champion wrestler of Lancashire.

John Meadowcroft successfully defended the Copenhagen Grounds title belt for 12 months (1862-1863) and thus became the owner of the belt and undisputed champion of Lancashire at 6 score 6 pounds. (9 stones).

To re-establish the championship in 1864 Thomas Hayes purchased the belt from Meadowcroft and started new competition for the 6 score 10 pounds (9 stone 4 pounds) championship of Lancashire with the same belt at stake.

On July 23rd 1864 Henry Counsel of Bank Top, near Bury won the 6 score 10 pounds Championship Tournament organized by T. Hayes with the belt at stake. He defeated John Meadowcroft 2-1 (0-1, 4 minutes 30 seconds; 1-1, 16 minutes 10 seconds; 2-1, 43 minutes) in the semifinal and J. Bentley of Oldham 2-1 (0-1, 30 seconds, 1-1, 17 minutes; 2-1, 8 minutes) in the final. That tournament was definitely the wrestling event of the year.

A title defence against Meadowcroft was fixed on December 31st 1864. Henry Counsel defeated John Meadowcroft 2-0 (1-0, 2 minutes 30 seconds ; 2-0, 5 minutes) and thus successfully defended his title.

A title defence against Meadowcroft was fixed for March 25th 1865, but the match didn't happen due to the withdrawal of one of the parties, I am assuming Counsel refused to defend his title, since on April 8th 1865 newspapers declared John Meadowcroft a new champion and belt holder, Counsel most likely stripped of his title for no defence.

On May 25th 1865, Edward "Teddy" Lowe (whose real name was Edmund Law), of Whitworth, defeated John Meadowcroft 2-0 (1-0, 4 minutes 30 seconds; 2-0, 9 minutes 15 seconds) for the title and belt and becomes new champion wrestler of Lancashire at 6 score 10 pounds.

On August 12th 1865 1,500 spectators witnessed a title defence by against J. Newton, known as "Teapot" of Stalybridge. Teddy Lowe defeated Newton 2-0 (1-0, 30 minutes; 2-0, 3 minutes 30 seconds) and thus defended his championship. J. Newton was undefeated holder of Salford Borough Gardens Championship Silver Cup at 7 score 2 pounds (10 stones 2 pounds) since 1861. That match was definitely the wrestling event of the year.

Around that time Lowe became the undisputed lightweight champion wrestler of Lancashire after he won the 6 score 6 pounds Champion Gold Cup at Higginshaw Grounds, Oldham on July 29th 1865. It was an elimination tournament open to all Lancashire men not to exceed 126 pounds weight limit. In the tourney's final Lowe defeated champion David Bentley of Starling.

The year 1865 will be remembered as "The Teddy Lowe Year." He was undefeated that year and won pretty much everything any Lancashire wrestler could dream of winning. During that year Lowe got married and becomes the co-owner (with his father in law S. Mercer) of the Hargreave's Arms at Facit, near Rochdale.

Edward "Teddy" Lowe successfully defended his title (6 score 10 pounds) for 12 months and thus became the permanent owner of the Champion Belt.

Around that time Thomas Hayes, proprietor of the Copenhagen Grounds, decided to establish a new championship (sweepstakes) at 9 stones and arranged an elimination tournament on October 1st 1866 which was won by J. Acton of Ashton when he defeated William Schora of Ashton in the grand final 2-1 (0-1, 3 minutes 10 seconds; 1-1 8 minutes 45 seconds; 2-1, 4 minutes 30 seconds). J. Acton received £10 as the prize money. There were no physical trophies involved.

In 1867 Hayes and Lowe decided to bring the original title and belt back to existence and organised together the elimination tournament for the Championship of Lancashire at 6 score 14 pounds. The tournament was held on June 24th and was won by Frank Robinson

of Ashton who defeated Joseph Birtwistle of Bagslate 2-0 (1-0, 45 seconds; 2-0, 4 minutes 30 seconds) in the grand final.

Thus Robinson became the new champion at 9 stones 8 pounds and holder of the Copenhagen Grounds Champion Wrestling Belt. Interesting details of the tournament, in the early rounds of the tournament Robinson was supposed to meet ex-champion Lowe, but they decided "not to wrestle each other" (since they already planned match between them in the nearest future) and toss of a coin let Robinson continue the competition. On his way to the final Robinson also eliminated famous David Bentley of Starling winning match in 18 minutes.

Later in the same year on November 23rd Frank Robinson wrestled Edward "Teddy" Lowe with 9 stones 8 pounds title and belt at stake, and their match resulted in a 1 hour 35 minutes draw. The match was supposed to be continued another day. On Monday (November 25th) another match between the two masters of catch ended up in a 50 minute draw. After that both wrestlers got their stakes back and decided not to wrestle again for that belt. At that time Lowe and Robinson were both recognized champions and belt co-holders by Thomas Hayes, but since they couldn't decide the championship they returned title belt to Hayes and resigned their championship claims. The rivalry between Lowe and Robinson during that year reached it's peak and definitely brought the great interest of local sporting circles and was the biggest attraction to the Lancashire wrestling fans.

In January, 1868 Hayes, Lowe and Robinson decided to establish a new championship An elimination tournament for the title and belt at stake with at least four participants was planned. Lowe and Robinson were barred from the competition. The matches never happened so belt was returned to its owner Edward "Teddy" Lowe, who retired belt.

That was the end of the Copenhagen Grounds Wrestling Championship. The title was never restored and next year Thomas Hayes didn't renew his license at Copenhagen Grounds and the grounds were demolished in 1869. Hayes moved to the Haymarket Hotel at Deansgate (Manchester) and was still promoting pedestrianism and wrestling at other Manchester based sporting venues. Thomas Hayes was one of the founders of Lancashire Wrestling Association in 1876.

In 1868-69 the new generation mat star John Massey of Ashton challenged veteran Edward "Teddy" Lowe for the title and belt several times The challenge was accepted at catch-weight, Lowe never putting his belt at stake again.

The names of the **Copenhagen Grounds Wrestling Champions** and Belt holders in chronological order:

9 stones Championship

1861 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe

1861 Thomas Haigh (Hague) of Ashton

1861 William Schora of Ashton

1862 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe

1862 Joe Acton of Hurst (Ashton)

1862 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe

Title retired by John Meadowcroft at 126 pounds weight limit

9 stones 4 pounds Championship

1864 Henry Counsel of Bury

1865 John Meadowcroft of Radcliffe

1865 Edward "Teddy" Lowe of Whitworth

Title retired by Edward "Teddy" Lowe at 130 pounds weight limit

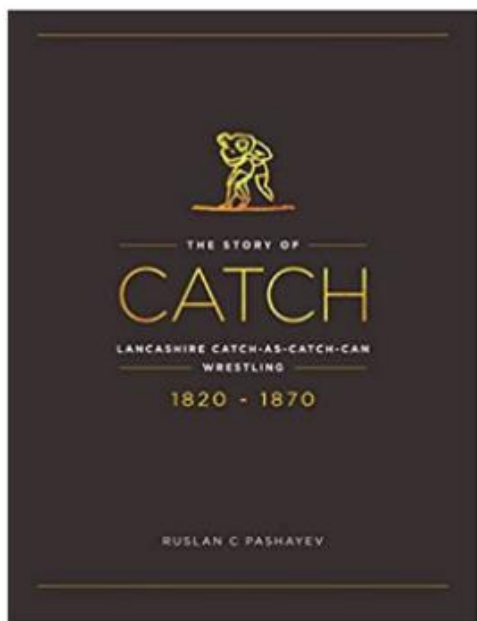
9 stones 8 pounds Championship

1867 Frank Robinson of Ashton

Title retired by Frank Robinson and Edward "Teddy" Lowe at 134 pounds weight limit

Notes

(1) Pedestrianism was a 19th-century form of competitive walking, often professional and funded by wagering, from which the modern sport of racewalking developed.



Buy From Amazon

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.

Please comment in the Talk Wrestling Forum

All questions, comments and corrections are welcomed at

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