

**EXCERPTS FROM CONFUSING THE ENEMY:
THE CUS D' AMATO STORY**

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1949

THE FORMATION OF THE IBC

Jim Norris had always had a fascination with the criminal underworld. Although he came from a wealthy, socially prominent family, he was tantalized by the gangster lifestyle, the romance and the thrill of doing business with the mob. Norris was a man who could never get enough. He had a taste for the finer things in life, and he was enthralled with money, Power. Influence. Sunshine. Good shoes. Expertly tailored suits. Ladies who don't ask questions. Bartenders who mix a perfect martini. Horses who know the hand that feeds them. Fighters who understand the power of show biz. Racketeers who aspire to legitimate enterprise.

Jim Norris was a thrill seeker who had the resources to fund his insatiable need to control more and more of what mattered most to the man on the street – not that he ever gave average men a second thought. Norris was clear from the beginning that his new position placed him squarely within the crosshairs of Boxi-

ana. This was the allure of the deal.

By mid-1949 Jim Norris and Frankie Carbo wielded incomprehensible power in the business of boxing. They were both attractive and charming, and extraordinarily savvy in managing the personal aspects of prizefighting. Each brilliantly strategic, they both had unfailing instincts in the skills of making money. Norris found himself in the enviable position of nearly always making deals from the negotiating advantage of holding all the cards.

The two men had a quickly denied fascination for each other that resembled the feelings of the head cheerleader who harbors a secret crush on the captain of the basketball team. The irresistible prospect of late night negotiations over brandy and cigars upstairs at 21 or at the Stork Club with breathtaking blondes in décollete-baring evening gowns and dangling rhinestones waiting on the sidelines. Each was perfectly clear as to the sway and the swagger of the other.

Both Norris and Carbo had standing reservations at Toots Shor's, where wives were notoriously unwelcome. One night in October of 1949, they took occupancy of adjacent tables at precisely 8:00. The food was not the draw at Toot's – it was quite simply, the place to be seen in Gotham. If you were among the luminaries who had a standing reservation - the list included Joe DiMaggio, Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, Judy Garland, and Marilyn Monroe - this was the highest credential of social cache.

Although Carbo and Norris may have had a passing acquaintance, they did not know each other well. Until recently Norris had spent more of his time with his thoroughbred horses than he did with fighters. His intersections with Boxiana had been few, with most of his knowledge coming from the daily news and the urban legend of Jacobs Beach rather than personal experience.

But as the seduction of an involvement with organized crime

migrated from fantasy to reality, he realized that the time had come for a sit-down with The Gray. He thought it highly probable that Carbo would make an appearance at Toot's this Friday night but never imagined the good fortune of a neighboring table.

Norris asked the waiter to send a round of cocktails to the booth Carbo shared with a Lana Turner look-alike in emerald satin and pearls.

Carbo, impeccably dressed in a white dinner jacket, approached Norris' table and extended his hand as Jim rose in greeting.

"Mr. Carbo, how nice to see you. I'm not sure we have met formally."

"Yes Norris, entirely too much time has gone by without making your acquaintance. Can we correct that one day very soon?"

"Most certainly....Would you care to join me at Aquaduct one afternoon this week? We could have lunch at the club."

"A perfect solution; I have an interest in a horse running in Thursday's race. I'll give you a call tomorrow and we'll confirm."

On the surface it appeared that these gentlemen very quickly found a way to advance their separate business interests without treading into the space of the other. Each seemed to honor the position of the other and was respectful of the assets he brought to the enterprise in which they were astonishingly co-dependent.

In-the-know observers concluded the two men had found a way to peacefully coexist. With an unwritten understanding negotiated at the Aquaduct race track the following Thursday, Jim Norris and Frankie Carbo came into complete control of the most popular sport in America.

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1956

NORRIS AND CUS HAVE A SIT DOWN

Cus generally dressed more like a Wall Street banker than a boxing manager. He changed into his dark suit, and his lavender tie held firm by his pin collar. He polished his shoes, which had suffered considerably in the rains of the previous week, and put on his now-signature Homburg.

About 9:15 he stepped under the awning at Jack Dempsey's. The doorman opened one side of the big double doors and gave Cus a nod of recognition. Cus knew Norris was likely to be in the upstairs dining room. He asked to be seated upstairs and sure enough, Norris was at a table by himself against the far wall. Norris was flanked by a glass of red wine, a filet mignon, and the *Chicago Tribune*. Too predictable. Cus told the maitre' d he was going to say "hello" to his friend and left the menu untouched on the table.

As Cus approached, Norris immediately rose and extended his hand. Norris was nothing if not gracious and personable.

"Cus, just the man I want to see....." Cus shook Norris' hand. "Would you care to join me?," Norris gestured to the chair opposite his.

Cus did not respond but pulled out the chair.

"What are you drinking...waiter..... what can we get you, Cus?"

"A glass for my guest, Mario." He summoned the waiter, not waiting for Cus' response, and gestured to the empty wine bottle that sat on the table. Cus stepped into the space between the chair and the table.

Norris sat down and replaced his napkin in his lap as Cus seated himself, leaving the chair pushed back so he could cross his legs.

"Have you had dinner? Would you like a steak? Why don't you join me medium rare?"

Cus did not answer. Norris signaled the waiter again, who was used to Norris' ways.

After an appropriate amount of small talk, which was customary given that Norris was from an old, well-heeled Lake Shore family, he finally got to the point: "Your boy looked pretty good the other night in Kansas City."

"Yeah, he's going all the way. Floyd Patterson is the next heavyweight champion of the world."

"I think you may be right, Cus. How shall we structure this to ensure that it is a winning proposition for both of us?"

"With Marciano out of the picture, I am not really feeling the need to work anything out with you, Norris. The fans and the newspapers are doing a fine job of fighting my battle for me."

"Cus, the heavyweight title is vacant. This kind of inactivity is not good for any of us or the sport as a whole. Nobody is making any money. We need a strategy that we can take to the Commissioner to put either your guy or my guy in the title and let him defend it. How can we do that to our mutual advantage?"

"The only thing that makes sense is for Patterson to get Tommy Jackson outta the picture and then we let Floyd and Archie Moore have a title bout. I don't think me and you have an issue with that one. That's da easy part."

"The obvious solution,," Norris said as Mario placed a gorgeous fillet in front of Cus.

"What we got to sort out is the terms."

"Well, Cus, the terms have already been negotiated through the Boxing Managers Guild. You get the standard Garden contract plus the agreed upon \$4,000 on the broadcast contract."

"I want \$50,000 for my fighter and a televised main-go at the Garden."

"Cus, this has all been worked out with the Commission and the Guild. There's nothing to discuss."

"Give me the match, Norris, or we fight Marciano with another promoter."

"What do you mean another promoter – there is no other promoter who can make that match."

"Try me, Norris. Meet my terms or I do it without you."

"Marciano is out of the game, Cus. My offer is the standard contract. There's nothing further to discuss."

"You are absolutely right, Norris, there is nothing to discuss." Cus got up from the table and walked out of Jack Dempsey's. He had not touched the fillet or the glass of Cabernet.

Norris was furious. If he did not get Patterson into the Garden for a title fight, then all the big money was off the table. If Cus could get Marciano back into the ring it would be an enormous windfall for someone else. He had to concede that he had underestimated Cus D'Amato. He thought Cus would be so anxious to get to the crown that the negotiation would not be complicated. He had failed to anticipate Cus' savvy and the fact that he fully

understood the power he held.

When Cus exited Dempsey's he hailed a cab. Inside the cab he laughed out loud. He had not had this much fun in years. The meeting had gone better than he had hoped. He showed Norris that the power had shifted. For Cus, the game had become much bigger than the heavyweight championship. Finally he had gotten to the fun part. The juice..... How far could he take it? How much could he get out of it? The possibilities were spinning in his brain. For the second time that day the stalemate was a victory.

Cus gave the cab driver the address of the St. Mark's Bath in the East Village where he liked to go when he needed to recharge his batteries. Before he went inside he crossed the street and entered an unmarked storefront with navy blue velvet curtains on all the windows. He sat down at the bar and ordered a scotch – something he did only rarely. He sipped the single malt and looked at his reflection in the mirror over the bar. The other men at the bar were all in conversation with one another and no one observed his intense stare as he sat and examined his own face. It was as if he was exploring a new person, getting to know a stranger. He studied his close-cropped white hair and dark brown eyes. Nothing new there. He looked at his jaw line and cheek bones. He smiled to observe where the wrinkles were forming around his eyes. Then he laughed out loud again. He liked what he saw.

It had taken him a long time to get comfortable with who he was, but lately he was finding he was much more accepting of himself. He found he always knew what the next step should be, almost intuitively. He had a confidence in his own judgment that had been a long time coming, but he wore it well. He enjoyed the awareness that he was different than the others. He liked a different sort of person, preferred to socialize in a separate, increasingly private world, and found that maintaining a quiet existence in this

other world was simpler than he had originally assumed.

He finished his scotch and crossed the street to the bath house entrance. He paid the fee and picked up a couple of towels. Cus selected a long locker so he could hang his suit. He stripped out of his clothes and walked down the hall to the large room where many of the men congregated. These men were lawyers, dentists, bankers, chefs, and politicians. There was an unspoken code that protected the identity of the clientele.

He recognized a fellow he had met there before and walked over to say hello. He found the easy camaraderie of the bath house relaxing. He felt at home in this room full of like-minded men who sometimes needed to escape the exhausting effort of keeping up the pretense of being someone you are not. Hiding the fear, burying the anger, hoping no one guessed the truth. This was one of the few places he could truly let go of the façade.

He sat down on the bench as one last fleeting thought passed through his mind – what if Norris called his bluff?

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JUN. 1959

FLOYD KO'D IN THE THIRD

The press and the fans were thrilled that Floyd was finally facing a real title challenge. Despite Ingemar's embarrassing performance at the Helsinki Olympics, he had emerged with a reputation as a powerful fighter with a mean right-hand punch, which he called his "TUNDER!!!" and the press labeled "The Hammer of Thor". Although not a sophisticated strategist, he held a fourteen pound advantage. Patterson weighed in at 182 pounds, Johansson at 196 pounds.

*When It Rains, It Pours – Washed Out
Boxing Fans Miss Stunning Upset as
Johansson Hi-Jacks Heavyweight Title*

Washington Square News 27 June 1959

Melvyn Kunsterman

Ingemar Johansson claimed the heavyweight championship title Friday evening as rain-soaked fans at Yankee Stadium endured temperatures hovering in the upper 80's. Floyd Patterson was sent to the canvas seven times before referee Ruby Goldstein stopped the fight two minutes and three seconds into the third round. Patterson had been heavily favored to win, but Johansson made the trip worthwhile for the scores of Swedes who traveled across the pond to cheer for their Nordic hero.

Both the press corp and the fans waited expectantly for the promoter, William Rosensohn, to call a second postponement as weather conditions worsened and seats remained empty. The fight was originally scheduled for Thursday, June 25, but downpours forced rescheduling to Friday, putting the bout in direct competition with the action at Madison Square Garden. The television network took the unprecedented step of hiring popular radio broadcaster Howard Cosell to provide between-round commentary live from Yankee Stadium.

The first two rounds of the title bout caught the attention

of the spectators, if only for the fact that many of them assumed Patterson was going to dispatch the Swede with ease. Their interest was heightened when Pat failed to dominate from the opening bell. The faithful began to speculate there might be a fight after all.

Round 3: Patterson came out of his corner "very gay"; to quote Pierce Egan, the inimitable British boxing writer who defined the art of ring commentary, but was immediately stunned by Thor's hammer. Johansson connected with the jaw, sending Patterson down. He was back on his feet within the ten count, although his eyes were lost in the distance. He stumbled as he rose from the mat and drifted toward Johansson's corner rather than his own. The crowd, smelling the possibility of an upset, went wild. As soon as Patterson had righted himself, Johansson let lose the "Tunder," again sending Pat back to the canvas. He got up only to be sent down a third time. And a fourth. Then a fifth and a sixth. Johansson's chest was spattered with Patterson's blood and the crowd spoke in whispers as Patterson, glassy-eyed and on rubber legs, made his way to his feet one last time.

The power of Johansson's colossal right was audible as he floored Patterson a staggering seventh time. The referee signaled, and the punishment was stopped.

"All dose wussy fans what did not want to get der feet wet, dey missed da upset of a lifetime." Constantine "Cus" D'Amato, Patterson's terrier-like trainer, stated from the side of the table where Patterson lay with compresses burying his face. "Da challenger's training methods caused people to wonder, but you cannot fault success." The former champion was unable to comment.

"Dis was not the plan." D'Amato continued, "I don't take nothin' for granted but I tought we was on easy street. I knew Ingo had dis right-hand punch but he's a pretty-boy. He's nuttin but a banger, see. He don't have no strategy, much less a bad one. He just goes in da ring and watches for the opportunity to let go his right."

The hype for the fight had been considerable, with the bulk of the attention paid to Ingemar Johansson and his entourage ensconced at an upscale resort in the Catskills. Johansson traveled not only with his golf clubs, but also with his parents, several of his in-laws, and

his beautiful fiancé/secretary Birgit, who was the object of more photos than Ingo at the camp.

The Patterson camp was quite dull, by contrast. Housed at Chatham Township, New Jersey, the all-male retinue cooked their own steaks and washed their own shirts, as the television blared incessantly. Patterson had taken a mere five days respite from training after his victory over Brian London on May 1 in Indianapolis.

The brave crowd who sat through the preliminaries were drenched by an uncomfortable mix of their own perspiration and the relentless drizzle that ceased only minutes before the main event.

Jose Torres and Al Andrews fought on the undercard, with a KO in the 6th, as Torres continues his ascent into middleweight title contention.

"Tonight's fight put us right where we want to be.", D'Amato offered as he exited the Garden. "Floyd Patterson is gonna be the first heavyweight champion ever to regain the title. We will claim the crown again in the rematch." He came to a complete stop in the middle of 8th Avenue, proudly proclaiming, "It's the making of a legend."