

## Small Towns Produce Big Champions

by Dennis Payton Knight

Three athletes born and raised in tiny Colorado towns rose to become the top names in their sports. If you ask how, the likely answer for each is they approached the challenge of competition in the spirit of expecting to win and gave it their all in the pursuit.

Manassa, Colorado, a village in Colorado's San Luis Valley, in 1885 produced Jack Dempsey, the "Manassa Mauler". He grew up in a poor family that moved often for work, and dropped out of elementary school at 15. He roamed around, traveling under boxcars and sleeping in hobo camps, visiting saloons and challenging for fights. He would proclaim "I can't sing and I can't dance, but I can lick any SOB in the house" and got paid from the winnings of happy bettors. He fought professionally and worked his way up to become world heavyweight boxing champion from 1919 to 1926. He is still considered one of the greatest boxers of all time.

Glenn Morris was born in 1912 to a farm family of seven children near Simla, Colorado on the eastern plains. He entered Colorado Agricultural College, now Colorado State University in 1930, starring in several sports and earning All-American recognition in track and field. After graduation he decided to train in the decathlon, in hopes of competing in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. In qualifying, he scored a new world record. Then he broke the record again in the Berlin Games, the same Olympics in which America's Jesse Owens was the surprise star, delighting Americans and humiliating Adolph Hitler. But by taking gold in the Iron Man competition, Glenn Morris was deservedly honored as the world's greatest athlete. He went on to play Tarzan in a film in which he was said to be a better Tarzan than the movie was a movie.

Byron White was born in 1917 and raised in the town of Wellington near Fort Collins, Colorado. He went on to play football at the University of Colorado in Boulder, earning All-American honors and picking up the nickname "Whizzer" that followed him to his chagrin the rest of his life. White was an outstanding student who planned to attend Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1938, but he was drafted that year to play for Pittsburg in the NFL. Oxford allowed him to delay his start until 1939, and then with the outbreak of World War II, he instead entered Yale Law School. Byron "Whizzer" White attended Yale for two years while at the same time playing for the Detroit Lions as one of the most popular and highest paid players in the NFL. He entered the Navy in 1942 for war service, and afterward elected to finish law school rather than return to football. He practiced law in Denver until 1962 when President Kennedy appointed him to the U.S. Supreme Court where he served more than 30 years, a respected justice and Whizzer to the end.