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March 13, 2006

James J. Houlihan,
Houlihan-Parnes,
One West Red Oak Lane,
White Plains,
New York 10604.

Dear Jim,

I enclose some copies of articles on Irish boxers that I wrote for The Ring. Use them as you wish. They are on Dan Donnelly, Rinty Monaghan, Tom Sharkey and my choice as the ten best Irish fighters of all time.

Have you had confirmation that Dan Donnelly's arm will be part of the exhibit?

Best regards,

The Best Of

THIS MONTH: IRELAND

1. Jimmy McLarnin
2. Barry McGuigan
3. Nonpareil Jack Dempsey
4. Jack McAuliffe
5. Mike McTigue
6. Dave McAuley
7. Rinty Monaghan
8. Tom Sharkey
9. George Gardner
10. Jim Coffey

By Patrick Myler

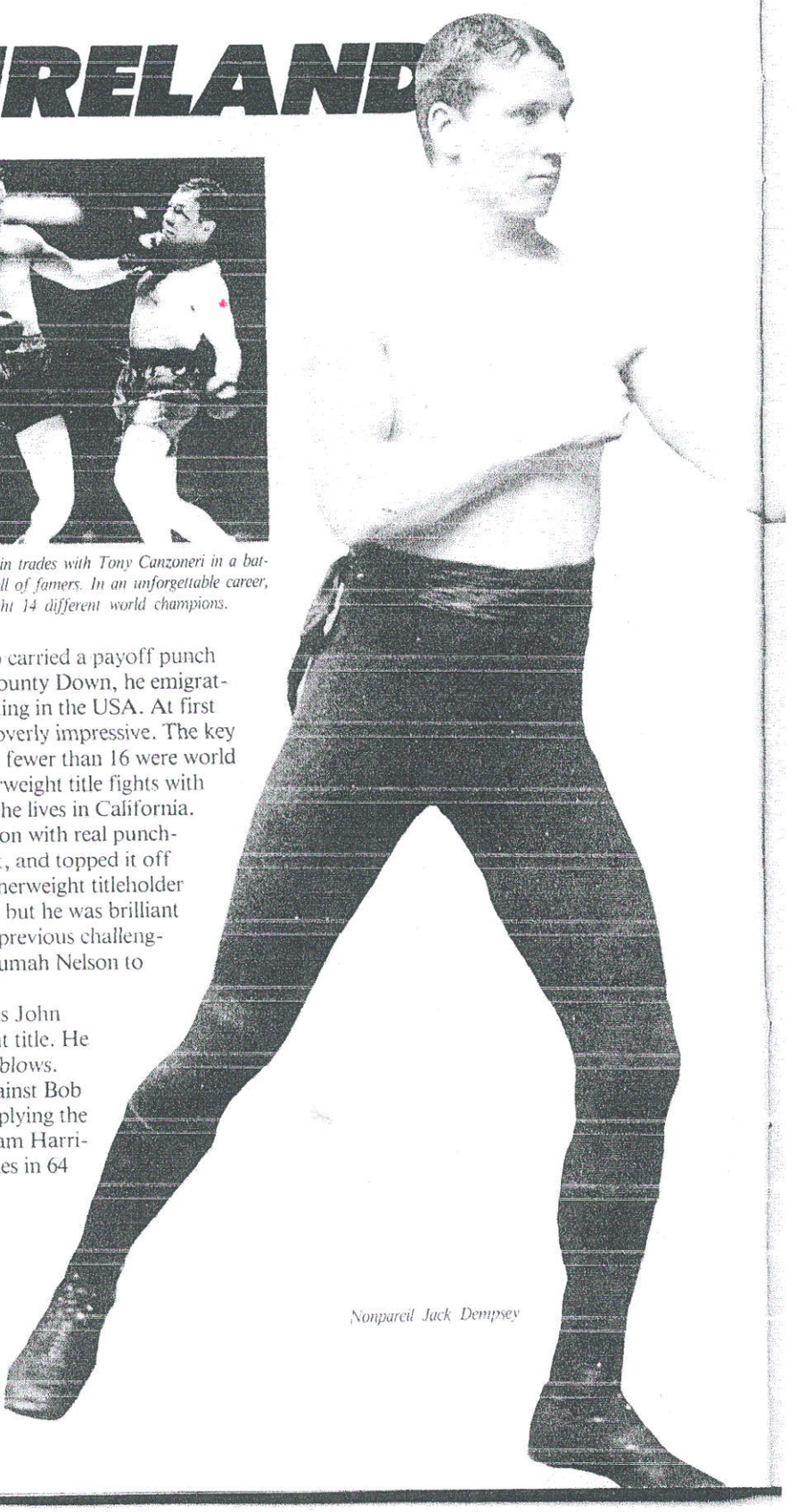
Jimmy McLarnin trades with Tony Canzoneri in a battle of future hall of famers. In an unforgettable career, McLarnin fought 14 different world champions.

Jimmy McLarnin was a gifted boxer who carried a payoff punch in both hands. Born in Hillsborough, County Down, he emigrated to Canada as a child and did his fighting in the USA. At first glance, his record of 63-11-3 (20) is not overly impressive. The key to his greatness was the quality of his opponents; no fewer than 16 were world champions, and he beat 14 of them. His three welterweight title fights with Barney Ross were ring classics. Now in his mid-80s, he lives in California.

● **Barry McGuigan** augmented sustained aggression with real punching power, a long reach, and good lateral movement, and topped it off with 100 percent dedication. His reign as WBA featherweight titleholder (June 1985 to June 1986) was disappointingly short, but he was brilliant in toppling Eusebio Pedroza, who had thwarted 19 previous challengers. What a pity he never faced WBC champion Azumah Nelson to prove who was top gun.

● **Nonpareil Jack Dempsey**, whose real name was John Kelly, was the first holder of the world middleweight title. He was noted for the accuracy and clever timing of his blows. His courage was proved when he refused to quit against Bob Fitzsimmons. Even Fitz took pity on him before applying the finisher. Dempsey, who inspired heavyweight William Harrison Dempsey to adopt his name, lost only three times in 64 contests.

● **Jack McAuliffe** did better than his pal Dempsey. He fought 36 times and never lost. Mind you, he was on the lucky end of a few dubious decisions, especially in his 74-round draw with Englishman Jem Carney for the undisputed lightweight title. McAuliffe's supporters stormed the ring when he looked a beaten man. Rarely in top condition, Jack was a naturally gifted boxer with the durability to survive long battles.

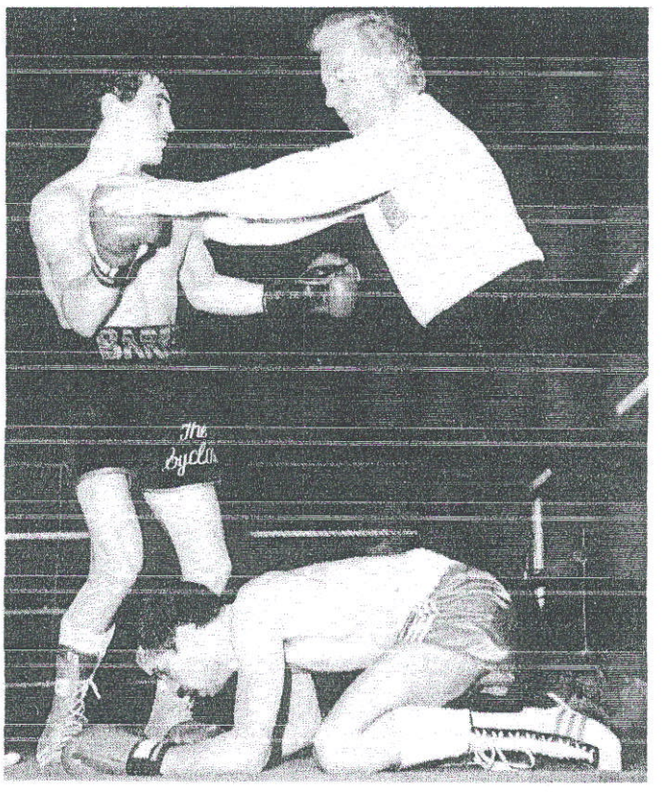


Nonpareil Jack Dempsey

THE RING, JUNE 1993

A Nation

Who was the best British fighter of all-time? The best Mexican? The best Japanese? The debate will rage forever. In an attempt to fuel the fire, or at least offer some perspective, *The Ring* has asked several of its correspondents to compile their personal top-10 lists.



Flyweight champion Dave McAuley slugs it out with Rodolfo Blanco (above left). The Irishman rose from four knockdowns to win on points. Featherweight Barry McGuigan kayos Farrid Gallouze (above right) to retain the European title.

● **Mike McTigue** was as exciting as watching a caterpillar munching a cabbage. His ultra-cautious style didn't endear him to anyone but his wife, who liked to see him come home unscathed. Nevertheless, his speed and pinpoint jab enabled him to outsmart bizarre Battling Siki in Dublin on St. Patrick's Day 1923, and capture the world light heavyweight crown. How could he have lost?

● **Dave McAuley** claims more successful title defenses than any other Irish-born champion. In an age when world crowns are as plentiful as flies in a farmyard, his five retentions of the IBF flyweight belt doesn't quite have the merit of bygone times. But the Irishman never let cuts or knockdowns (there have been plenty of each) get him down. He was one of the gutsiest champions of recent vintage.

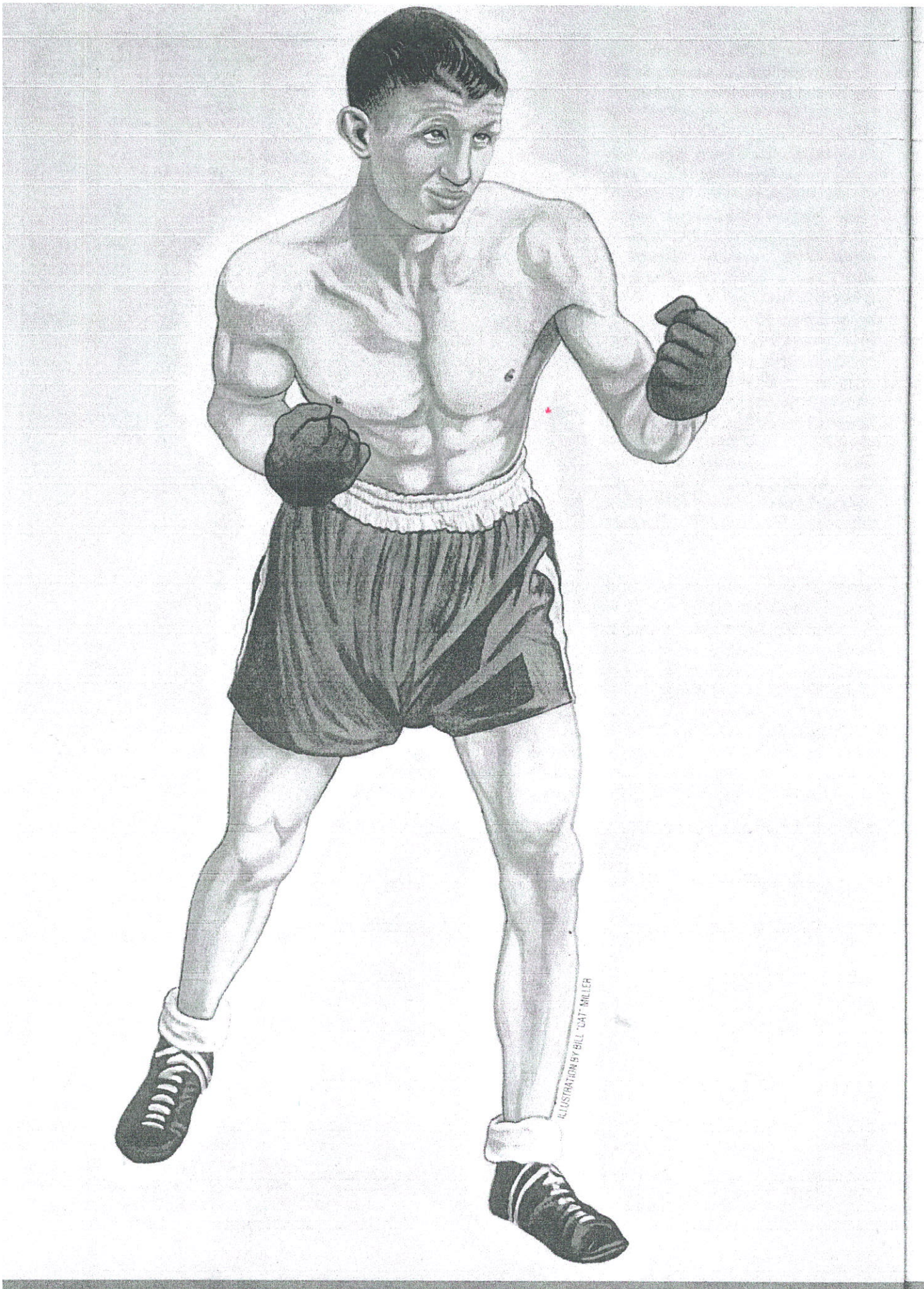
● **Rinty Monaghan** got his nickname from the '30s movie wonder dog Rin Tin Tin. The little Belfastman fought like a bulldog, aiming to end proceedings with a powerful right hand. Usually he succeeded. Trouble was, he often spoiled things by turning in some stinkers. He was still king of the world's flyweights when a chest injury forced him to quit in 1950.

● **Tom Sharkey** misses out on the list of Irish-born world kings. But he was one of the roughest, toughest, gamest fighters of them all. Only 5'11" and 180 pounds, he took on the biggest and best around the turn of the century. World champion James J. Jeffries, 35 pounds heavier, twice failed to put him away, first in a 20-rounder, then in a bitter 1899 title battle lasting 25 rounds.

● **George Gardner's** black mark was losing the world light heavyweight crown to a 41-year-old over-the-hill Bob Fitzsimmons. But he did topple top-notchers such as Kid McCoy, Jack Root, and Peter Maher, and, in 1902, survived 20 rounds with Jack Johnson. At his best, Gardner was a clever stylist with a fairly decent punch.

● **Jim Coffey** was one of the numerous White Hopes paraded as a potential conqueror of despised black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. Knockout wins over Soldier Kearns, Fireman Jim Flynn, Jack "Twin" Sullivan, and Arthur Pelkey catapulted him into the front ranks. But in 1915, Frank Moran's sweet "Mary Ann" right hand caressed him to sleep in the third round.

Patrick Myler, who is based in Dublin, has written a book on Irish boxing history. He is a frequent contributor to The Ring. ■



RINTY MONAGHAN, FROM BELFAST,
WORLD FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION 1947-50

'40s FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION

RINTY MONAGHAN

Win Or Lose, He Left Irish Eyes Smiling

By Patrick Myler

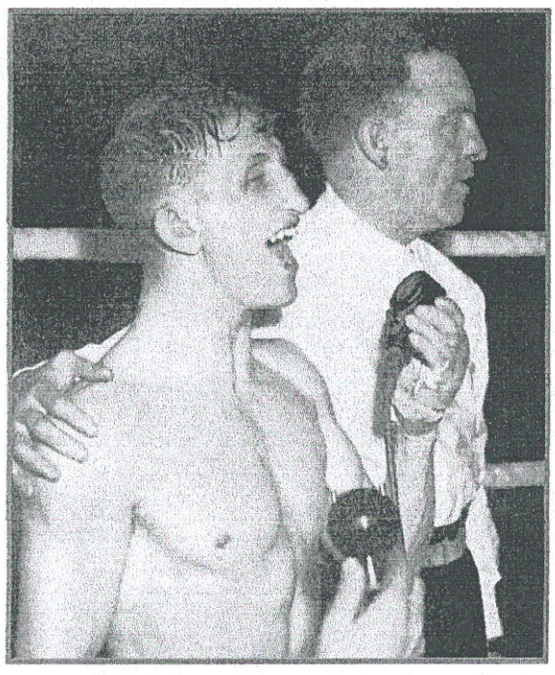
In any consideration of the best value-for-money fighters in history, Rinty Monaghan must be near the top of the list. Who else but the chirpy little Irishman, after a hard 15-round world title fight, gave the audience an extra treat by taking the mike and breaking into song?

The fact that he could find such surplus energy becomes more amazing when it's remembered that, for the last few years of his career, he was suffering from a chest ailment that hampered his breathing and would force him to retire in 1950 while still world flyweight champion.

It had gotten to the point that, if Monaghan didn't give his full-voiced rendition of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," and maybe "Hello, Patsy Fagan" as an encore, the fans would feel cheated. So, no matter how much pain or exhaustion he was suffering, he made sure he always sent them home happy.

But Monaghan was always an entertainer. From the time he started slinging punches for pay at the tender age of 14 to performing his cabaret act right up to the time of his death at 63, he could always be relied upon to put on a show.

"If I was starting all over again, I think I would try to be a top entertainer rather than a fighter," he once said. "Nevertheless, I can't grumble. Life really has been a load of laughs for me. I was only serious when I stepped into the ring."



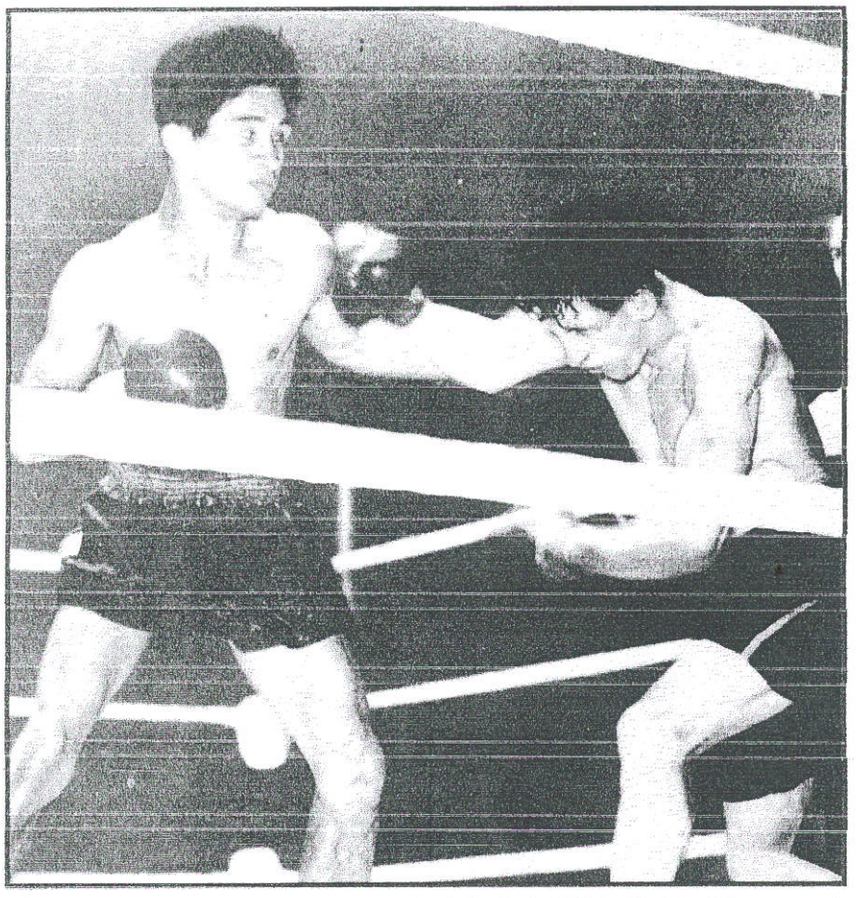
Win or lose, Monaghan always serenaded the crowd after his bouts, frequently with "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." After his career was over the popular Irish fighter had a cabaret act, singing and doing impressions.

Life, however, wasn't too much fun for Monaghan's parents, who struggled to provide for a hungry brood of 13 children, eight girls and five boys, in the grim, dockside area of Belfast where they lived. The future world champion, born on August 21, 1920, was christened John Joseph. It was his grandmother who called him Rinty, because of his love for movies starring the wonder dog Rin Tin Tin.

Schooling was rudimentary and, at 13, he was put to work in the famous Belfast shipyards, where generations had toiled to turn out mighty ocean-going vessels, including the ill-fated Titanic. Monaghan sought the hardest physical jobs to build up his muscles and used up whatever spare energy he had at a local amateur boxing club. Encouraged by his father, a former Royal Marine who had boxed as a lightweight, he enjoyed the lively sparring sessions. He never had an amateur contest, and signed as a professional before his 15th birthday with Frank McAloran, a former Irish featherweight champion. The close relationship with his manager lasted throughout his 16-year career.

By the age of 18, Monaghan weighed just 105 pounds, but was regularly facing opponents at or above the flyweight limit of 112 pounds. Nonetheless, his busy, aggressive style took him through his first 33 fights with only one defeat, to Jim Keery, and four

THE RING APRIL 2004



Monaghan lands a right to Dado Marino's shoulder during their 1947 bout that the Irishman won via controversial decision. The victory earned him a version of the flyweight title, but it wasn't until Monaghan beat Jackie Paterson the following year that he was universally recognized as champion.

draws. His progress came to a sudden halt when Jackie Paterson, a hard-hitting Scottish southpaw, arrived in Belfast to knock out the local favorite in five rounds. It was a huge shock, as it was the 17-year-old Paterson's second professional contest.

To celebrate his debut as a top-of-the-bill performer, Monaghan had bought a lurid silk dressing gown, and a great cheer greeted him as he bounced into the ring and leapt around in his usual prefight display. For four rounds, the Belfastman dazzled his opponent with his speed and shots from all angles, but he got cocky and was caught with a superb left hook that put him flat on his back. Up at nine, but out on his feet, he was dropped by another left for the full count. It would be the only time Paterson, who would go on to precede him as world flyweight champion, would emerge victorious in their three encounters.

Nineteen days later, Monaghan was back in action to convincingly outscore Joe Curran, who would last 15 rounds with Paterson in a British title bout eight years later. Curran put up such a game display in Belfast that English promoter Johnny Best enticed the Irishman to travel to Liverpool, Curran's hometown, for a rematch. Monaghan left nothing to chance, stiffening Curran in the fifth round.

As with all European boxers of the period, Monaghan's ring campaign was badly affected by Adolf Hitler's reign of terror. Throughout World War II, he boxed just eight times, winning four, losing three, and drawing one. He did his bit serving with the Merchant Navy, during which his ship was torpedoed, then as an ambulance driver for Belfast's Civil Defense, and finally, to his great joy, as a member of ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association), which entailed traveling all over Europe helping to keep up troop morale.

When the war was over, Monaghan considered taking up a show business career. As a member of a group called The Three Hillbillies, he sang to the accompaniment of his pals on the guitar and harmonica and did impressions of popular personalities of the day. But boxing remained his first love.

Soon he was back to his rigid training routine, which included working on a farm, climbing up steep Cave Hill, just outside the city, chopping down trees, swallowing raw eggs, and washing them down with a pint of goat's milk. Then, in the evenings, he would train at manager McAloran's downtown gym.

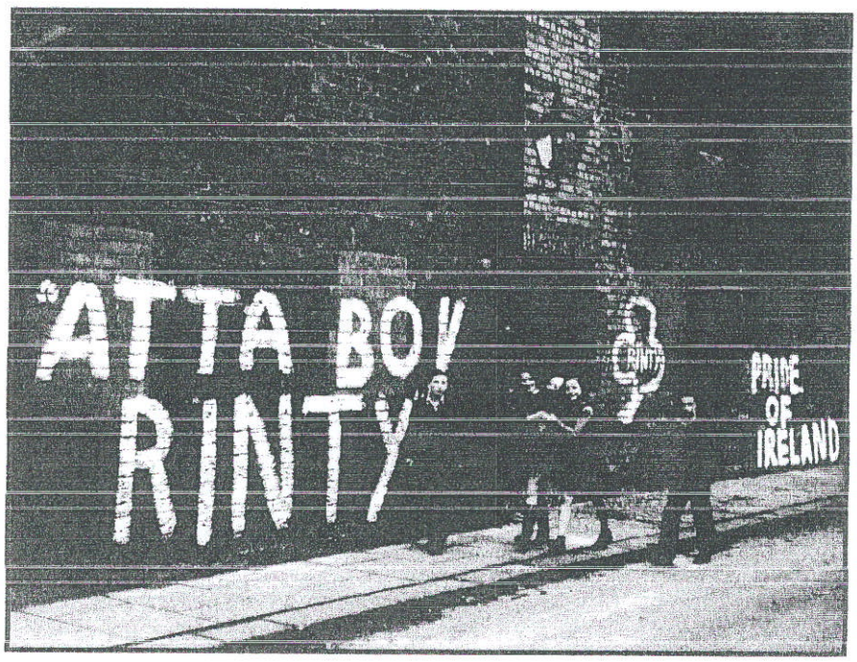
Boxing boomed in post-war Belfast and promoter Bob Gardiner delightedly put up the "house full" signs on November 6, 1945, when Monaghan took on Eddie "Bunty" Doran for the vacant Northern Ireland flyweight title. Rinty knocked his local rival cold in the fourth round, and the celebrations only ended late that night when the champion sang from his bedroom window to the huge crowd gathered outside his home in Little Corporation Street. Rated number 10 in the world by THE RING back in 1939, he had been dropped for inactivity, but was now up to number four.

In April '46, Monaghan was coming up to 26 and knew that lost time had to be made up if he was to achieve the fistic fame he had always dreamed about. His opportunity came when Paterson, now world champion, was enticed over to Belfast for a return match. Rinty got his revenge—but not the title. The scheduled 10-rounder was at a catch weight, as the Scot was known to be struggling to meet the 112-pound flyweight limit. Paterson was forced to retire with a badly cut eye after seven rounds.

"It was generally conceded that I was well ahead on points and that I outpunched and outfought Paterson," Monaghan later recalled. "After the fight I obliged the crowd with a song, but for once I made a bad blunder."

The song he chose was "Broken Hearted Clown," a real party favorite guaranteed to have guests weeping into their drinks, and the many Scots in the audience took it as a slur on their defeated hero. Monaghan's next fight was against Alec Murphy in Glasgow, and the locals made clear their animosity to the Irishman before and after his points win.

"I never had the slightest intention of hurting Jackie's feelings," Monaghan explained. "In the exciting atmosphere I had simply sung the first song that came into my head. I didn't realize its implications until it was too late."



Monaghan poses with his wife, Frances, and their three children outside of their home in Belfast, Northern Ireland (above). Monaghan was a huge favorite in Belfast and his fans covered the walls of his neighborhood with graffiti in his honor (below).

Now rated top contender by THE RING, he was sure his world title chance would come. Much to his annoyance, he heard that Paterson would make his next defense in Glasgow against Dado Marino of Hawaii. As there was some doubt about the champion's ability to make the stipulated poundage, Monaghan was engaged to stand by in case he was needed as a substitute. A week before the scheduled date, he was told he would not be needed, so he went on holiday, indulging his voracious appetite on his standby pay.

Back in Scotland to watch the world title bout, he was enjoying a hearty meal in a restaurant when the news got out that Paterson had collapsed just before the weigh-in and wouldn't be able to fight. A search party organized by the frantic promoter found the Irishman and hurried him to the scales. Well over weight and in no fit condition to face a fully trained, highly ranked opponent, he nevertheless agreed to go ahead with the non-title contest before a sellout crowd at Ibrox Park, home of the Glasgow Rangers football club. In a farcical affair, Monaghan mauled and spoiled against a frustrated Marino until, in the ninth round, he was disqualified for persistent holding.

Top British promoter Jack Solomons then stepped into the picture. He had seen Monaghan make a sensational London debut by halting Terry Allen in a single round and then outpointing French champion Emile Famechon. Solomons paired Monaghan with Marino over 15 rounds on October 20, 1947, and advertised the contest as being for the vacant world flyweight title, taking it for granted that Paterson would never again make 112 pounds.

Paterson, however, was a proud champion and was not prepared to concede defeat. He obtained a court order preventing the British Boxing Board of Control from recognizing anyone else as champion or approving any contest not involving him as being for the title.

So the Monaghan-Marino fight went ahead with just America's National Boxing Association and the Irish Boxing Board of Control accepting it as being for the world title. After a dull encounter, enlightened briefly when the Hawaiian scored an 11th-round knockdown, Rinty's hand was raised by referee Teddy Waltham, the sole

Nat Fleischer, editor and publisher of THE RING, presents Monaghan with his championship belt.

arbiter, as the winner on points. He had done most of the leading while Marino, keeping a tight defense, tried to steal the points with late rallies in each round. The 10,700 spectators at London's Harringay Arena only came to life when the Irishman gave his customary rendition of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," which drew sustained applause.

Back in Belfast, no one fell asleep as the radio commentators tried their best to make the dire affair sound interesting. Nor did anyone care that Monaghan was only a partial world champion. Bonfires were lit all around the fighter's home as crowds sang and danced in celebration of his victory. More relieved than excited was Monaghan's wife, Frances, who was so nervous that she spent the entire duration of the contest pacing up and down outside her sister's house while other family members sat inside glued to the radio. Only when someone rushed out to tell her that her husband had won did she permit a smile.

The only way the disputed championship could be settled was for Monaghan and Paterson to meet in the ring. The British Board gave the Scot six months to agree to the match or forfeit his claim. Bob Gardiner scooped his promotional rivals by signing the pair to meet at the King's Hall, Belfast, on March 23, 1948. His only worry was that Paterson would be unable to make the flyweight limit. Jackie did, but at terrible cost.

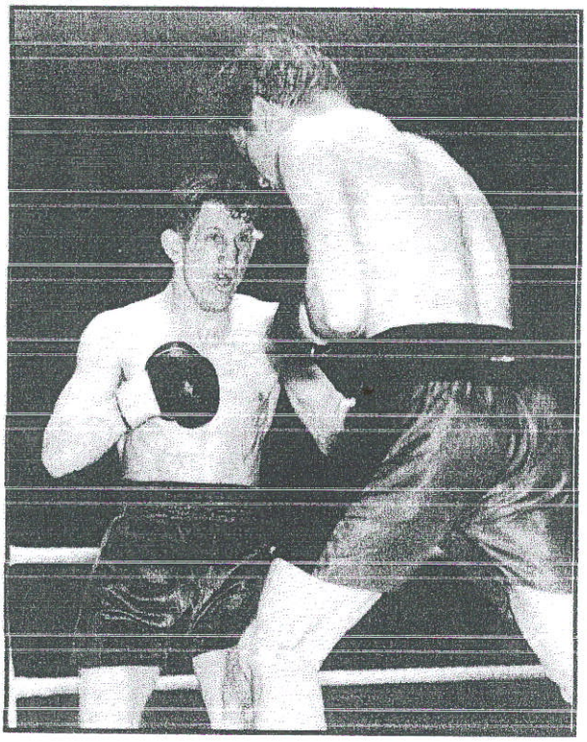
On the day of the fight, Monaghan weighed in at a pound inside the limit, but there was no sign of Paterson. He had been due in Belfast the day before, but failed to show. Reporters were getting ready to write their stories that the fight was off when Jackie swept through the doors and stepped onto the scales. Looking pale and drawn, he made the weight with four ounces to spare. It was later revealed that he had spent the previous night playing cards in front of a roaring fire, smothered in heavy sweaters, in a desperate bid to lose the excess poundage. He left it to the last minute to catch a plane.

Monaghan, while aware that his opponent would be weak after his ordeal, remembered the damage that Paterson had done with his big punch in their first encounter and started cautiously. In the second round, however, he saw an opening

Monaghan walks Beauty the goat in the countryside outside of Belfast where he trained. Monaghan always drank goat's milk when training for a big match.

and dropped the Scot with a swift hook. Paterson survived and even had Monaghan on the run in the next round after shaking him with a right.

By the seventh round, however, Paterson was weakening badly, and a terrific right bounced him off the canvas. Lurching up groggily at eight, he was driven into a corner by the fury of Monaghan's attack. Propped up by the ropes, he took a ferocious pounding before sliding slowly to the floor to be counted out. After the now undisputed world flyweight champion took the mike for his usual party piece, Belfast again went mad. Fans marched from the arena to pull down fences near his home and light bonfires that blazed right through the night.



Monaghan, who suffered from chronic bronchitis, gasps for breath as arch-rival Terry Allen advances. They fought three times, with each winning once and the final meeting ending in a draw.

The first home-based Irishman ever to win a world title also picked up Paterson's British and British Empire crowns. He added the European championship to his collection in his first world title defense, against Maurice Sandeyron, again in Belfast. A top-form Monaghan was a clear points winner after 15 hard rounds against the durable Frenchman. It was noticeable, however, that he tired badly toward the end, and ringsiders could plainly hear his wheezes and sharp intakes of breath. Still he managed to perform his "Irish Eyes" act for his loyal supporters.

After a non-title points win over Italian Otello Belardinelli, Monaghan put all four of his prizes at stake against London barrow boy Terry Allen in Belfast on September 30, 1949. Little did anyone realize beforehand it would be the Irishman's last ring appearance.

Allen had qualified for his big chance by outscoring Monaghan in a non-title bout seven months earlier, avenging his quick defeat by the Irishman in 1947. He brought over a big crowd of supporters from London to the King's Hall for his championship bid and had them roaring expectantly when he dropped the champion in the second round. But Allen failed to follow up his advantage and generally gave a disappointing performance.

Monaghan, clearly having difficulty with his breathing, fought well in patches, but sought frequent rests in clinches. At the end of 15 tedious rounds, referee Sam Russell thought neither man had done enough to win and declared a draw. The home crowd thought their man had been robbed and a threatened riot was only averted when Monaghan vocalized that Irish eyes were still smiling. Despite the unsatisfactory result, he was still champion.

Three years before his death in 1984, Monaghan points to a photograph of himself during his championship days. Thousands lined the streets of Belfast for Rinty's funeral.

On April 25, 1950, Monaghan announced his retirement due to chronic bronchitis. Almost 30, he stepped down as undefeated world flyweight champion and with a 51-9-6 (20) record. Two years later, he wanted to make a comeback, but was refused a license by the British Boxing Board of Control.

A happy-go-lucky character who couldn't resist a hard-luck story, Monaghan had little to show for his years in the ring, but he readily accepted that he would have to go on working to provide a living for his wife and four children. He drove a cab and then a truck while raking in some extra cash as an entertainer. Not all his stage performances were for pay. Charity organizers never had to ask him twice and, as well as his singing, his Popeye and Olive Oyl impressions always brought the house down.

Failing health curtailed his cabaret work in his later years, but he was a familiar figure on big fight nights in Belfast and he was always ready to give useful advice to promising youngsters.

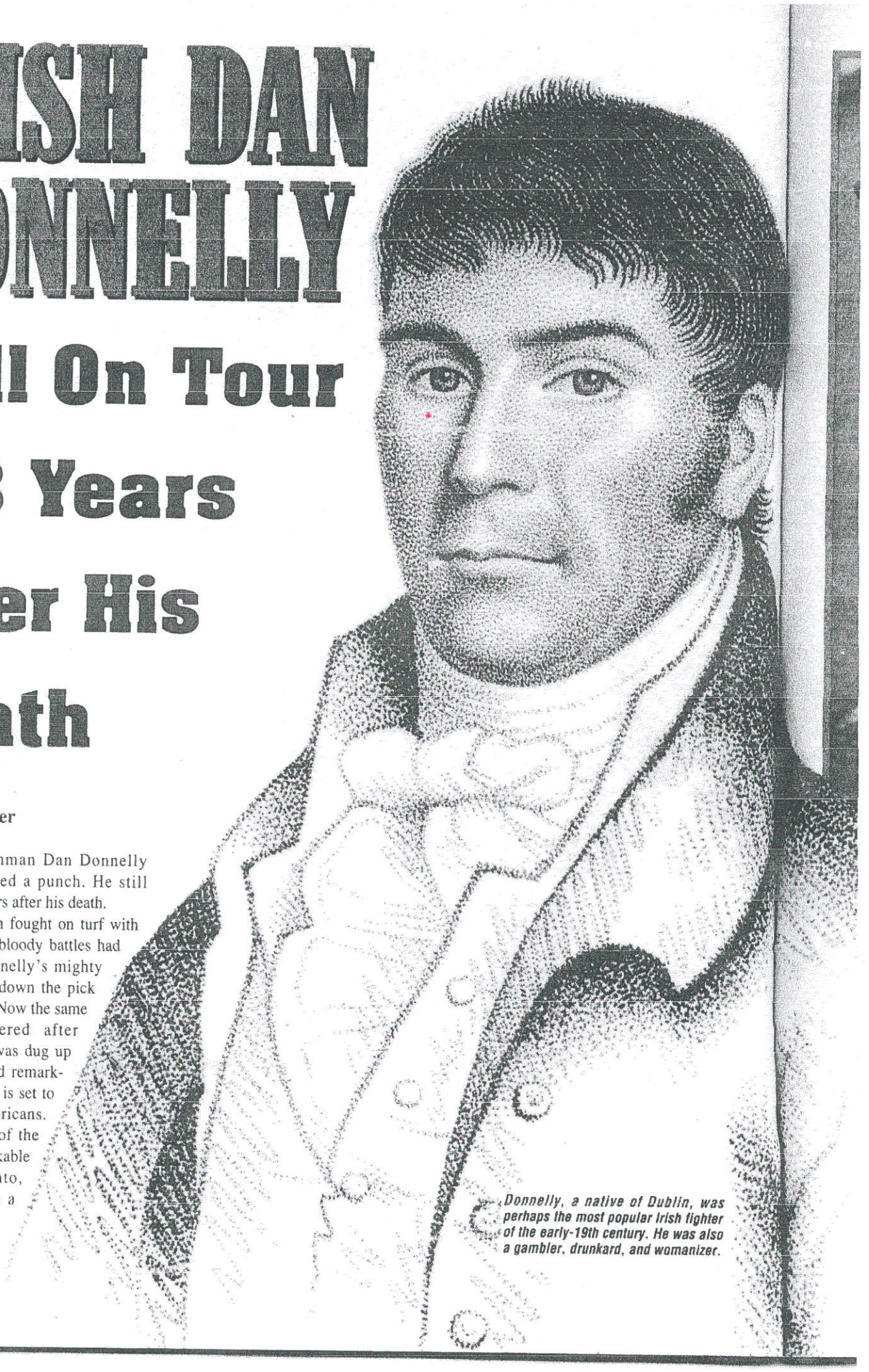
When Rinty died on March 3, 1984, thousands lined the streets of Belfast for the funeral. Father Myles Murray told the congregation in St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Donegall Street: "He brought good news. He was a gentleman, loved by many. That is what life is all about, touching people, bringing joy and happiness, making friends."

Terry Allen, who won the vacant world title on Monaghan's retirement and then lost it four months later to Dado Marino, said: "Rinty was a fascinating character. We were rivals in the ring, but like brothers out of it. He always seemed to be happy and made everyone in his presence happy. A great champion and a great sportsman." ■

Patrick Myler is a freelance writer based in Dublin, Ireland, who has written several books on boxing and is an occasional contributor to this magazine.

IRISH DAN DONNELLY

Still On Tour 178 Years After His Death



Donnelly, a native of Dublin, was perhaps the most popular Irish fighter of the early-19th century. He was also a gambler, drunkard, and womanizer.

By Patrick Myler

Fighting Irishman Dan Donnelly always packed a punch. He still does, 178 years after his death.

When brave men fought on turf with bare knuckles, and bloody battles had no time limit, Donnelly's mighty right arm smashed down the pick of British pugilism. Now the same lethal limb, severed after Donnelly's corpse was dug up by graverobbers and remarkably well-preserved, is set to bowl over the Americans. Des Byrne, owner of the world's most remarkable pugilistic memento, plans to take it on a U.S. lecture tour.

"I'm hoping to

THE RING, MAY 1998

Until recently, Donnelly's arm was on display at The Hideout tavern in Kilcullen, County Kildare, Ireland, owned by Jim Byrne. Behind Byrne is a poster showing one of the many ballads written about Donnelly and an illustration that greatly exaggerates the length of his arms.

get sufficient backing to make such a trip worthwhile," said Byrne. "There has always been great interest in Donnelly's arm and endless demands for more information on its original owner."

For more than 40 years, the grisly relic was displayed at the Byrne family's tavern, The Hideout, in Kilcullen, County Kildare. Visitors would marvel at the sight of the blackened arm, coated with preservative after it was severed from the fighter's body. Time after time, Byrne's late father, Jim, and Des himself, would be called upon to tell the story of the fighting hero and how his powerful right arm wound up in a glass case in an Irish bar.

Donnelly, born in Dublin in 1788, was idolized by his countrymen after his great victory over England's George Cooper on

the Curragh of Kildare, on December 13, 1815. Up to 20,000 spectators had arrived by whatever horse-drawn transport was available—many gladly walked the 30 miles from Dublin—to see the brawny carpenter smash Cooper's jaw with two terrific blows after 22 minutes of fighting.

As he strode up the hill of what is still known as Donnelly's Hollow after the fight, his fanatical followers dug out the impressions of his feet. They are still there today, leading from the monument commemorating the famous battle.

Bonfires were lit all over neighboring counties in celebration of Donnelly's victory, and taverns ran dry trying to meet the demand. The hero of the hour happily joined in the festivities. By the time he arrived home in Dublin, eight days after the fight, Donnelly had hardly a penny left of his $60 purse.

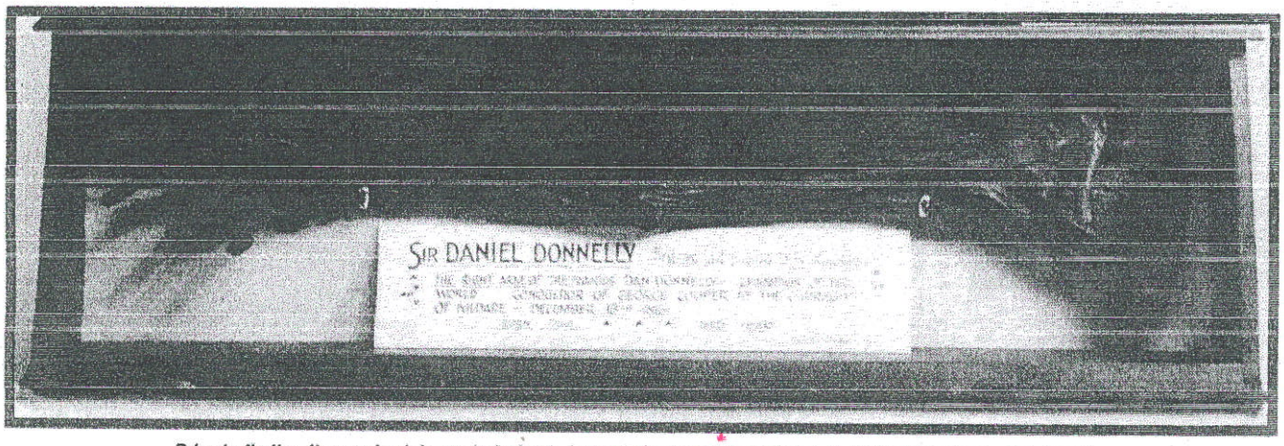
Among the many legends that grew from the occasion was the account of a character known as "The Sugar Cane Man." Just like the medicine men who sold their "magic elixir" off the backs of wagons in the Wild West, the Dublin street trader claimed wondrous qualities for his product.

Donnelly was having the worst of the fight against Cooper, so the story goes, when "Miss Kelly," sister of Donnelly's patron, Capt. William Kelly, slipped him a chunk of the candy.

"Now, me charmer, give him a warmer," she said. The rejuvenated Donnelly promptly delivered the knockout blow. If modern drug testing were available back then, Cooper might have been able to get the fight verdict declared void!

Mythology took over again when Donnelly traveled to England and was greeted by the Prince Regent. "Prinny," a renowned fight fan, supposedly laid the sword upon the Irishman's shoulders and declared him "Sir Daniel." If true, it would be the only time a member of the British royal family bestowed a knighthood on a fighter—and an Irishman at that! There is,

There is a monument in Curragh of Kildare commemorating Donnelly's epic victory over Englishman George Cooper in 1815. After the battle, fans dug up the impressions of footsteps their hero left behind as he strode away from what is called Donnelly's Hollow. They can still be seen today.



Prior to finding its way back home to Ireland, Donnelly's arm was exhibited at an English circus. But despite the legend that the fighter was knighted, there is no documentation to bolster the claim.

however, no documentary evidence that Donnelly was entitled to call himself "Sir Dan."

Another tall tale is that he had the longest arms in the history of the ring. Standing upright, it was said, he could button his knee-breeches without stooping. Actually, it is no longer than the limb of an average six-footer, which Donnelly was.

Hype about his invincibility was probably wishful thinking on the part of his blinkered fans. Though he never lost in the ring, Donnelly only had three major fights, and would have been a big underdog in a match with Tom Cribb, then the champion of England. Efforts to pair them came to naught.

Donnelly's only ring appearance on English soil was at Crawley Downs, in Sussex, on July 21, 1819. A sluggish Donnelly overcame some rough moments to defeat Tom Oliver in 34 rounds. He finished the bout with a hard right to the head and a tremendous cross-buttock. This tactic, executed by maneuvering an opponent on to the hip, then throwing him to the ground with force, was perfectly legitimate under the loose laws drawn up by English bare-knuckles champion Jack Broughton.

A hard drinker, gambler, and womanizer, Donnelly had nothing to show for his brief ring career. Even the four Dublin bars he ran at various stages failed to make a profit. He was either too generous with free drinks for his pals or helped himself too often.

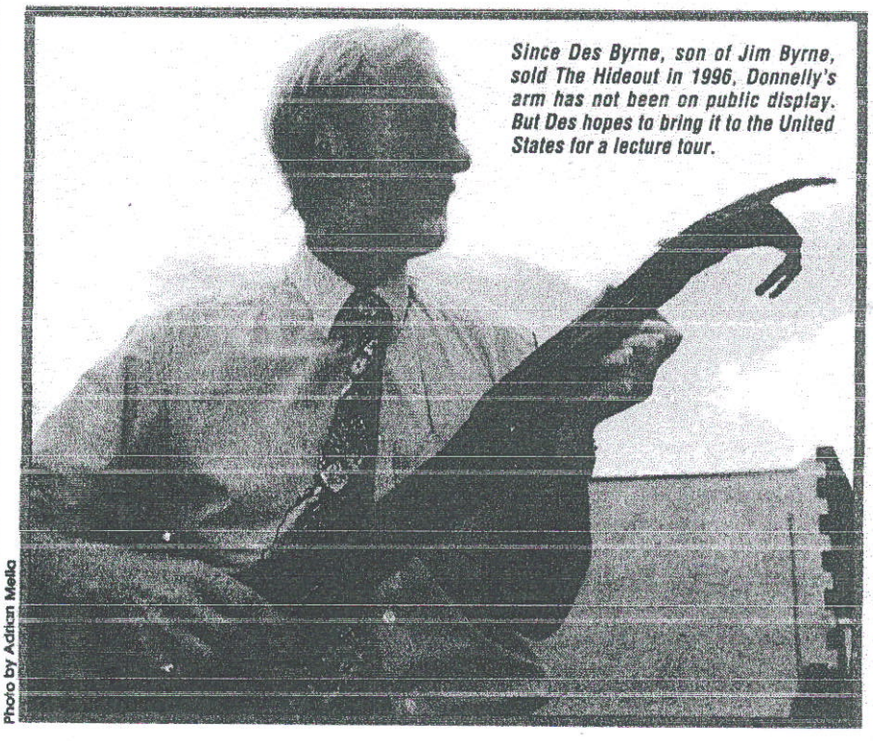
On February 18, 1820, Donnelly died of a fever, which followed a strenuous ballgame. He was only 32. Today, a wall plaque marks the site of his home above his last tavern, where he took the fatal count. But it is Donnelly's arm that continues to arouse the most interest.

When it was disclosed all those years ago that the body of the fighting Irishman had been stolen from his grave, there was a huge public outcry. The Dublin surgeon who had bought it from the bodysnatchers had it reburied, but only after secretly removing the arm. With its muscles and bones exposed, the limb proved a valuable asset for teachers of anatomy at Edinburgh University, Scotland. It then was passed to a circus owner who exhibited it on several tours of Britain.

In 1904, it was returned to Ireland and was on display at a Belfast bar for 50 years, until it came to rest at The Hideout. Unfortunately, it no longer holds pride of place there. When Des Byrne sold the bar in 1996 to run and develop a nearby gas station, he took his prized souvenir with him. He is now looking for a permanent home for the arm, where it can once again be available for public viewing. In the meantime, he wants to give Americans a first-hand look at the remarkable ring relic.

"If I can find a way to arrange a U.S. trip, I would be happy to show it to a wider audience," he said. "Donnelly's arm might be a gruesome sight, but it always is the center of attraction in the bar." ■

***Patrick Myler is an Irish sports writer and the author of* A Century Of Boxing Greats.**

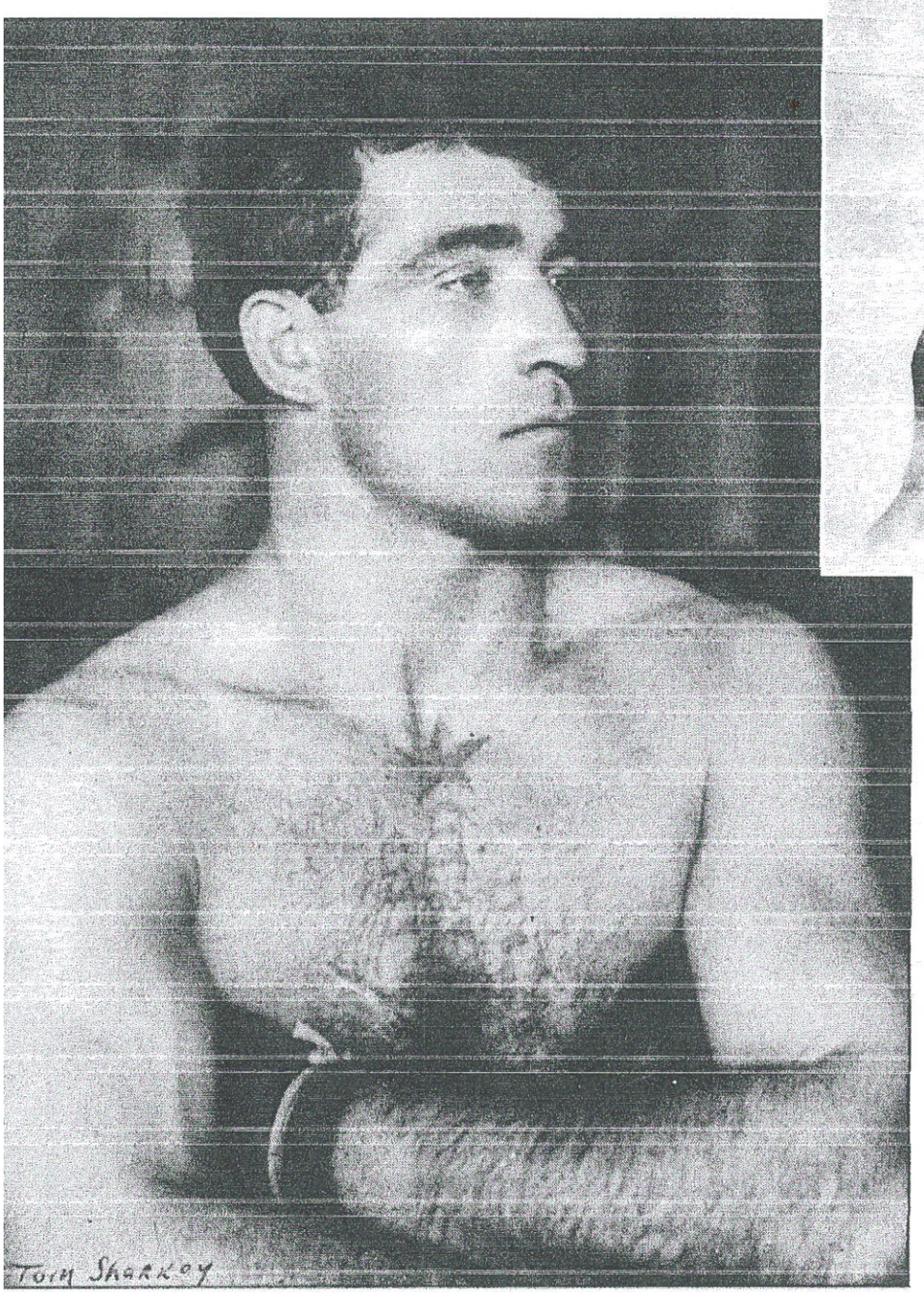


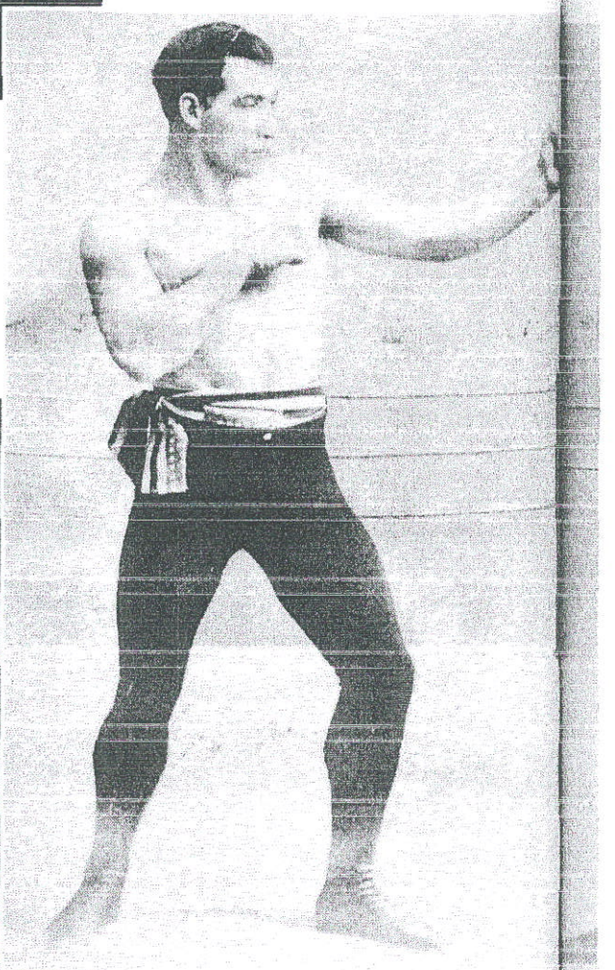
Since Des Byrne, son of Jim Byrne, sold The Hideout in 1996, Donnelly's arm has not been on public display. But Des hopes to bring it to the United States for a lecture tour.

Photo by Adrian Mella

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY HEAVYWEIGHT

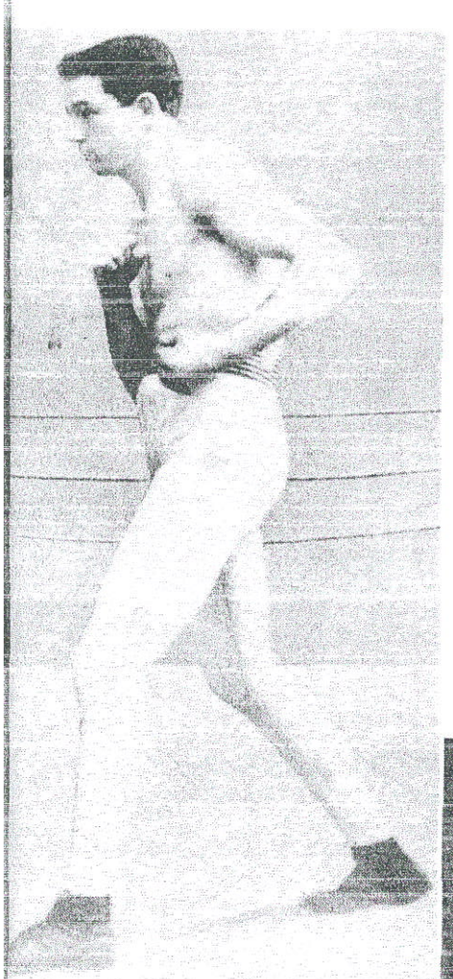
SAILOR TOM SHARKEY



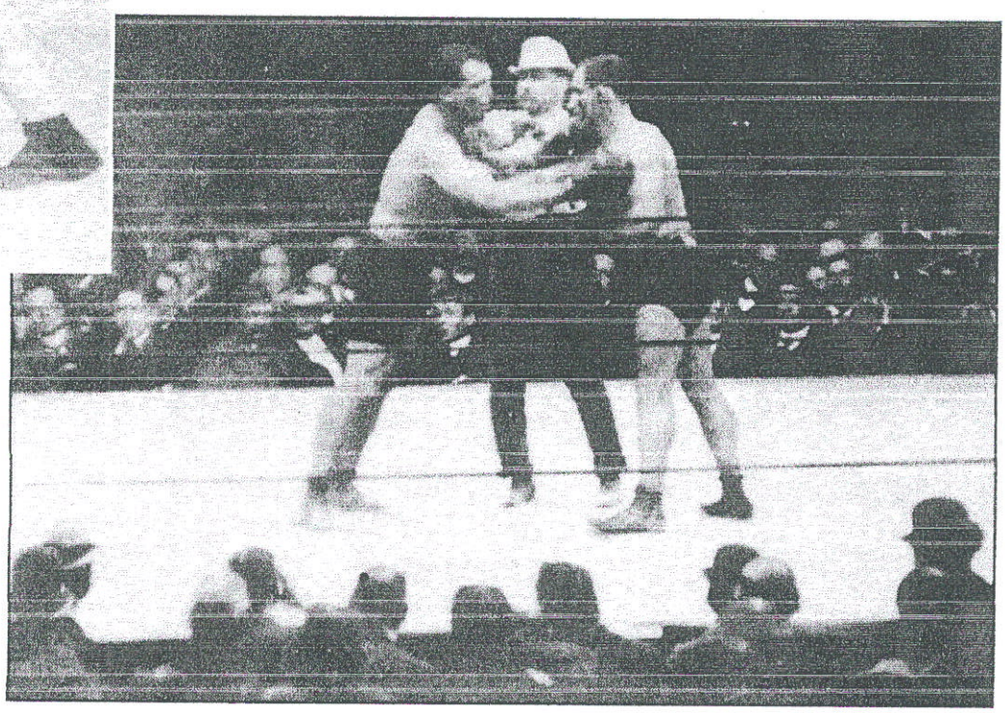


The Jerry Quarry Of His Day

THE RING, FEB. 1994



Above: Sharkey (seated) and Jeffries share a ride in a photo taken in the late-'20s. Below: Jim Jeffries (left) and Sharkey engaged in two memorable battles. Pictured is their second bout, fought for the world title in November 1899, and won by defending champion Jeffries via exhausting 25-round decision.



Sailor Tom squares off with former world middleweight champion Kid McCoy. They rumbled in January 1899, with Sharkey winning by 10th-round kayo.

By Patrick Myler

Fearless Tom Sharkey, who stretched no more than 5'8" from toenails to balding pate and weighed in at about 185 pounds, took on the biggest and best fighters at the turn of the century. They included heavyweight kings James J. Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, and Jim Jeffries. Sharkey even crossed gloves with a graying, portly John L. Sullivan in a three-round no-decision match in 1896.

But a pairing that seems to have escaped the notice of most ring historians is the occasion when "Sailor Tom" stormed into battle with Jack Johnson. The forgotten meeting took place at the Chicago World's Fair of 1934. Johnson had officially hung up his gloves six years earlier after being kayoed by Bearcat Wright and Bill Hartwell, but he continued picking up a few dollars in exhibition bouts. Sharkey had not fought in 30 years.

Had Johnson and Sharkey clashed at the peak of their powers, the pairing would have had fight fans drooling with anticipation. Sure, Johnson's

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Sharkey

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defensive genius and cutting counterpunches would likely have proven too much for crude slugger Sharkey, but the tearaway Irishman would not have let his bigger foe relax his guard for a second.

Giving away four inches in height and 10 pounds on the scales would not have bothered Sharkey any. Nearly every man he faced in the ring towered over him. But they all looked the same stretched out on the canvas, which was the fate of most of his opponents in a nine-year career that saw him lose just six times in 53 fights.

Tearing in with both fists flying, with little regard for what he might suffer in reply, was the only way he knew how to fight. Even in 1934, at the well-advanced age of 61, and in what was meant to be a harmless exhibition between two of the ring's great names, he wasn't about to change the habits of a lifetime.

Though it had been 19 years since he surrendered his world heavyweight crown to Jess Willard under a hot Havana sun, Johnson still cut quite an impressive figure. His trunks might have been hitched high to partly hide his expanding waistline, but the muscular definition of his arms and upper body were reminders of a once-magnificent physical specimen.

Sharkey, too, retained much of his powerful figure, the thick chest bearing its familiar sailing ship tattoo topped by a huge star, and the square jaw set in grim determination to put on a good show against the man many experts tagged the greatest heavyweight of them all.

At the bell, Johnson, flashing the gold-toothed grin that had infuriated opponents when the fighting was for real, eased forward, his waist-high fists weaving their customary pattern. His smile quickly evaporated and his large brown eyes shot wide open as he saw Sailor Tom coming toward him like he had been fired from a ship's cannon.

Proving that even at age 56 his renowned reflexes hadn't deserted him, Johnson picked off his opponent's introductory left swing with his right forearm, then grabbed Sharkey's right fist under his left arm to prevent the intended followup blow. It was the old master showing he hadn't forgotten the tricks.

Pulling the squat Irishman in close so that Sharkey's misshapen left ear (a souvenir of his many hard battles) rested against his chest, Johnson whispered into his good ear, "Hey, Tom, what are you trying to do to me?"

Sharkey's reply was a snarled swear word as he wrenched himself free and tossed another wild swing, which Johnson avoided with ease. Sharkey never gave up his attempts to pin a haymaker on the elusive former champion. Johnson was mighty relieved to hear the final bell.

Jack wasn't the first world heavyweight king to learn the short, thick-set Irishman was no pushover. Back in 1896, Corbett took on Sharkey and was lucky to get a draw. The contest was limited to four rounds, at Corbett's insistence. He had announced his retirement the previous year to take up an acting career, and was now in the initial stages of a comeback.

Out of condition after a tiring theatrical and personal appearance tour, "Gentleman Jim" boxed the head off the untutored Irishman for

two rounds—then ran out of steam. Sharkey roughed him up so badly that Corbett slumped on his stool after the four rounds and didn't leave the ring for half an hour. In his autobiography *The Roar Of The Crowd,* Corbett made the ludicrous claim that Sharkey didn't hit him once, but he did admit he had underrated his opponent's strength.

Two years later, Corbett, having lost the world title to Bob Fitzsimmons, again faced Sharkey in a bid to cement his claim to another crack at Fitz' crown. In his book, Jim made another extraordinary claim—that Sharkey had agreed there would be no infighting. Such a pact, if true, was sensibly ignored by Sailor Tom, who wasn't about to surrender the one area where he would be the master craftman's superior.

Floored in the second round, Corbett used his skill to pick up long-range points. But his ribs took an unmerciful battering from the aggressive Sharkey. By the ninth round, Corbett was weary and dejected. One of his seconds, Jim McVey, fearing his man's humiliation, jumped into the ring, claiming a foul by Sharkey. But the referee, "Honest" John Kelly, disqualified *Corbett.*

Sharkey claimed another heavyweight champion's scalp when he was declared the winner against Fitzsimmons. But again it was via unsatisfying ruling, an alleged low blow. "Ruby Robert" risked his life by vehemently disputing the decision, for the referee was none other than notorious gunfighter Wyatt Earp.

Fitzsimmons had won and lost the world crown before he met up again with Sharkey, at Coney Island in 1900. Sharkey suffered the most comprehensive defeat of his career when smashed down for the full count in the second round, but not before he had Fitz on the floor in the opening session.

Sharkey's reputation as a tough nut was never more clearly defined than in a riotous clash with fellow Irishman Peter Maher at the Palace Athletic Club in New York. Sailor Tom had his rival down and almost out in the sixth round, but in the next session it was his turn to hit the canvas. After the knockdown Sharkey jumped to his feet and tore into Maher like a madman.

The bell rang, but Sharkey still flailed away. The referee failed to stop him, so the police joined in. Still Sharkey swung away, hurting his own second, Joe Choynski, and opening a deep gash on an opposing cornerman's forehead. Finally, a rope was wound around the wild Irishman before he could wreak further damage. The referee called the bout a draw.

Sharkey notched impressive knockouts over some of the top-notchers of the period, men like Choynski, Gus Ruhlin, Joe Goddard, and one-time middleweight champion Kid McCoy. But it was his losing battles with the mighty Jeffries that ensured his recognition as one of the division's toughest and bravest campaigners. In two encounters lasting a combined 45 rounds, Sharkey, outweighed by 35 pounds and six inches shorter, doggedly refused to be crushed by "The California Grizzly Bear." Moreover, there were quite a few experts who alleged he was robbed of the world title in a grueling 25-rounder.

Both Sharkey and Jeffries were undefeated when they first paired off in San Francisco on May 6, 1898. After a bruising 20 rounds, Jeffries took a close decision. He promised Sailor Tom that if he won the world heavyweight title, he would give him first crack at it. He was as good as his word.

Five months after he dethroned Fitzsimmons, Big Jeff put his title on the line against Sharkey at New York's Coney Island Athletic Club on November 3, 1899. Thousands of fans braved a steady downpour to pay from $5 to $35 to witness the two men wage battle for sport's greatest prize and a $25,000 purse, winner take all.

The Biograph Film Company had secured exclusive rights, which required the setting up of a battery of 400 powerful light bulbs over the ring. When all these were switched on, the ring was like an oven. If ringsiders saw fit to complain about the heat and the blinding glare, think how it must have been for the fighters and referee George Siler.

Sharkey dismissed his physical disadvantages by adopting an aggressive role, shaking off the bigger man's heavy punches and getting home with punishing shots of his own. He shook Jeffries with a left hook in the sixth round, and the champion finished the round bleeding from the mouth and ear.

By the 10th round, the Irishman was considered ahead. He had pounded the champion's body until it was black and blue, and had inflicted severe facial damage. But Sharkey, too, had not escaped unhurt. His forehead was gashed and one ear was torn. It was only afterward revealed that Sailor Tom had battled from the third round onward with two broken ribs.

In the 17th round, Sharkey straightened up the crouching Jeffries with a right uppercut, then smashed a terrific left to the jaw. Sharkey later said it was the hardest punch he ever landed on

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Sharkey

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anyone. But Jeff just shook his head and resumed his onward march.

The failure to drop the rock-hard champion knocked much of the heart out of the fighting Irishman. Had it been a 20-rounder, there was little doubt Sharkey would have earned the verdict and his place as heavyweight champion. From the 20th to the end of the 25th, Jeffries displayed amazing recuperative powers and battered the challenger without mercy.

Sharkey survived two tremendous uppercuts in the 22nd to rock the titleholder with thudding right hooks in the next round. But the real strength had gone from Sailor Tom's fists. Most of the punishment was dealt out by Jeffries.

A remarkable incident occurred in the last round. As Jeffries threw a left hook, Sharkey clamped his arm down on the glove. The force of the blow sent the Irishman tumbling to the canvas, and as Sharkey fell, he pulled off the champion's glove. Siler tried to restore the glove but, in the meantime, Sharkey had regained his feet and was anxious to get on with the fight.

Sharkey dodged around the official and threw a punch at Jeffries. The champion yanked his hand free from the referee's grasp and hit back at Sharkey—with his bare fist. It was the only time a fight was contested with gloves and bare knuckles at the same time.

By the time the referee sorted things out, the final bell had rung. Jeffries was the winner and still champion. The verdict met with a storm of protests from the pro-Sharkey crowd. Even the neutrals thought the game Irishman deserved at least a draw. He had forced the action for two-thirds of the way, even if he took a pounding in the last third.

Years later, Jeffries told THE RING's founder/editor, Nat Fleischer, "They came no greater than Tom Sharkey. I split his eye open, and his ear was swollen as big as my fist. When I landed a blow on it, it was like hitting a big wet sponge. Yet he wouldn't think of quitting. I also broke two of his ribs and still he kept coming at me. He was as game a fighter as I've ever seen."

When Jeffries died in March 1953, Sharkey said, "Well, I finally beat him." Within a month, Sailor Tom, too, was dead. There never was much between them. ■

Patrick Myler is a freelance writer based in Dublin, Ireland.