



Dempsey's journey from boy to man

The great former champ found he had to dispose of a much-loved friend and benefactor and did so, ruthlessly, twice

IT was February 1918 and Jack Dempsey was sitting in his dressing room thinking about the guy he was going to fight in a few minutes, Bill Brennan.

Jack liked Brennan, a big and tough Irishman who had been good to the young Dempsey on his first visit to New York, some years before.

Back in those days Brennan was a top fighter and he paid the rough kid from Colorado 50 cents a day to spar with him at Crupp's gym on 116th Street.

Bill took a liking to the kid. He helped get him a place to sleep and gave him eating money. Dempsey didn't forget.

He was thinking of those things that night when there was a knock on the dressing room door and in walked Brennan, dressed for the ring. They warmly exchanged greetings.

"Jack," Brennan said, "That butcher you've got as a manager shouldn't have signed for this fight. I didn't want it but that lousy publicity he put out about you forced me to take it.

"I'm gonna have to flatten you. I don't want to but that big clown [Fred] Fulton is ducking me. If I don't take you out big, Jack, Fulton will get that shot at [Jess] Willard. So you gotta go. I hope you understand."

Dempsey's bronzed face took on a serious look. He knew Brennan wasn't just trying to put the wind up him, he was telling him how it was.

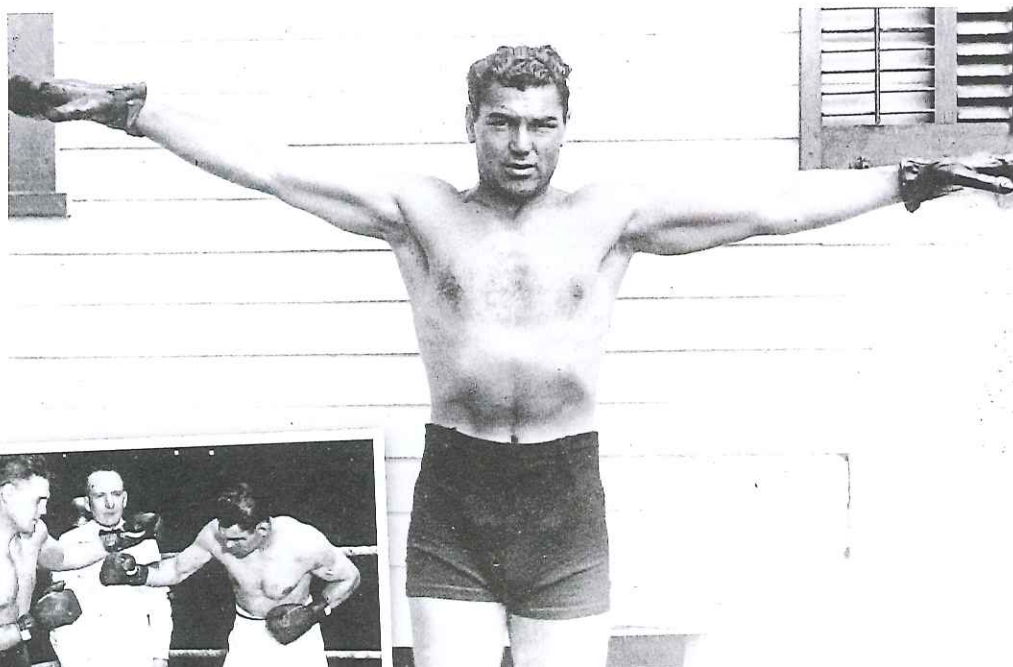
Unlike Gunboat Smith, Fireman Jim Flynn and Carl Morris, Brennan was not a leftover from the 'White Hope' years. Instead, Brennan looked upon the fight with Dempsey as a prelude to a match for the title.

"Bill," Dempsey replied. "I'm no hungry bum no more. Don't worry about me. I'll knock you kicking in the first round."

Brennan smiled – this was the gutsy kid he remembered. They wished each other good luck.

Brennan had taken the fight full of confidence, thinking it was an easy night's pay. A bad mistake. He was down in the first round and saved by the bell.

The second round saw Bill knocked down four more times. The beating continued until the sixth, when Jack hit him so hard that as Bill spun around he broke his ankle.



THE SECOND SAW BRENNAN KNOCKED DOWN FOUR TIMES

Dempsey went on to take the heavyweight title from Willard and in 1920 he gave his former employer, Brennan, a shot at his title.

Nobody really gave Bill much chance, including Dempsey himself. Many at ringside believed Brennan survived the first round because Dempsey was letting Brennan stay for the sake of the motion pictures.

But it all went wrong in the second round when Bill nailed Dempsey with a perfectly timed uppercut. The drama increased as the fight progressed with Brennan winning round after round.

In the 10th he landed a punch on Dempsey's left ear that split it open at the base. As sports writer WO McGeehan, sitting ringside,

observed, "Dempsey was white with rage as he glared at Brennan from his stool."

In the interval after the 11th Dempsey's manger informed him that only a knockout would save the fight and the 12th round saw Dempsey fight like a man possessed. He caught Brennan with a series of punches that knocked him down and the referee reached "10" a fraction before Bill regained his feet.

With an ear that "looked like a cross between a veal cutlet breaded and a sponge dipped in gore," Grantland Rice wrote, Dempsey returned to his corner. He had retained the title, but only just.

Later, Brennan visited Jack in his dressing room as the champ was having his partially severed ear sewn back on.

"It took you twice as long this time, you lucky stiff," he said. "It's my turn next."

But there was never a next time for Bill Brennan. He was shot and killed by thugs at the Tia Juana Club, which he owned, on Broadway in 1924. Ironically, he had bought the club with part of the \$30,000 he earned for the second Dempsey fight.

READY:
Dempsey
(above) is in
top shape
and (left) he
gets to grips
with tough
Brennan

Second chance for Farr book

TO all who missed buying a copy of Bob Lonkhurst's book on Tommy Farr, *Man of Courage*, you have another chance.

The original book came out to excellent reviews with *Boxing News* saying, "The material combining Farr's life and boxing career is well balanced, organised and runs fluently. Written with a lucidity of style and is obviously a labour of love, Lonkhurst's effort is a fitting tribute to a great boxer."

Man of Courage sold out when it was first published in 1997 and since then no copies have been available. Due to the continuing demand, Bob has republished the book on a short print run and these are available direct from him, priced £15.99 plus £2.50 post and package, at 6 Drayton Avenue, Potters Bar, Herts EN6 2LF. Phone: 01707-659756.