

GREAT RING CHAMPS OF THE PAST

SECRET THAT MADE BOB FITZSIMMONS WORLD'S GREATEST FIGHTER



BOB FITZSIMMONS

IN ALL the history of the fighting game only one man has ever held the world's championships of the top three divisions, and by virtue of holding them he must be ranked above all other boxers as the greatest fighter the world ever knew — Robert Fitzsimmons.

Not only did "Ruby Bob" hold the heavyweight, light-heavyweight and middleweight championships, but he won them at periods in his life so far apart as to make it seem incredible that anyone could stand the wear and tear of the game as long as he did.

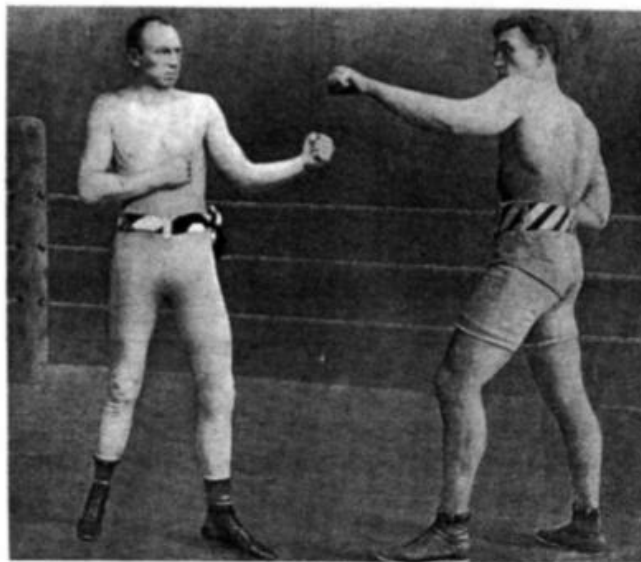
Fitzsimmons was twenty-eight years old when he wrestled the middleweight crown from Nonpareil Jack Dempsey, thirty-five years old when he won the heavyweight honors from James J. Corbett, and almost forty-three years old when he beat George Gardiner in a match for the light-heavyweight title.

And to top that off, he was fifty-three years old when the New York Boxing Commission arbitrarily put an end to his fighting career by refusing to allow him to enter a ring in the Empire State because he was too old.

Fitzsimmons was the prize freak of the ring. Possessing a powerful pair of shoulders, with long arms and a deep torso, he dwindled away to nothing in the legs until only the freckles which plentifully besprinkled his body made them stand out at all.

He was always slow on his feet and shuffled around the ring in flatfooted style, but when he landed his awful blacksmith punch it was inevitably curtains for his opponent.

Bob's tremendous success was due to a "secret punch" he had invented, which today is the most famous type of blow in pugilism. It was a punch on the solar plexus.



Bob Fitzsimmons, left, and Jim Jeffries square off before their grueling bout.

It was in his fight with the lamented Nonpareil Jack Dempsey that Fitzsimmons introduced what was then a new style of fighting. Up to that time fighters, big and little, had used round-arm swings. True it is that they used the left hand for jabbing purposes, but it remained for Fitzsimmons to introduce the hook on the jaw and the short-arm body jolt which won for him the middle and heavyweight championships.

RING TRICKSTER

Fitzsimmons, as all followers of boxing know, was a clever ring general and a thoughtful student of the science of fistiana. He was a trickster, but with it all he proved beyond peradventure that he was the hardest hitter the world has ever seen.

Yet the crushing blows that laid his opponents low were delivered, most of them, at close range. Probably no man ever thought that a punch traveling through six inches of space could knock a fighter out, but Fitz proved that this was possible on many occasions.

"If I can get close enough," he once said, "I'll guarantee to stop almost anybody. The bigger the men, the heavier they fall."

And so through his remarkable ring career Lanky Bob went on stopping the big fellows with these short jolts and smashes that were well-aimed and had a world of power behind them.

Fitzsimmons had the hands, the

arms and the shoulders — with which to land these blows effectively.

It was in his battle with Peter Maher at Langtry, Tex., that Bob showed what a six-inch jolt could do if landed on a vital spot. Maher had the famous Cornishman groggy in the first round when suddenly Robert stepped in at close quarters and with a terrific right-hand uppercut on the point of the jaw he sent the Irishman down and out.

This blow did not travel more than a couple of inches, yet it was with the force of a mallet that it was sent home.

It was then that ring experts realized that a new style of fighting was in vogue and that Fitzsimmons was hard to beat.

Those who remembered the tremendous right-hand swings of the mighty John L. Sullivan could not imagine how Fitzsimmons produced the same results with apparently less exertion.

They reasoned that it was impossible to get the same amount of power into such a little jolt, but at the same time they appreciated the fact that Fitzsimmons dropped his opponents with equal neatness and dispatch.

In preparing for his fight with Jim Corbett for the heavyweight title at Carson City Fitzsimmons practised these short-arm blows with a persistence that made his sparring partners wince again and again. Before he entered the ring for that memorable encounter he said: "I have licked

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Dempsey, Jim Hall, Peter Maher and Dan Creedon with short blows on the jaw and in the stomach, and I think I can do it to Corbett just as easily!"

Fitzsimmons was conspicuously outclassed in point of science by Corbett in the early stages of the mill. In fact, it looked as if Jim, the boxer, would be the winner after the sixth round, but it was in the fourteenth round that Fitz found the chance that he had been waiting for.

Stepping in close, as Corbett dodged a feint with the right, Bob drove home a short but terrific left-hand smash on the solar plexus. Down went Corbett, but before he reached the floor Fitz hooked him with the right on the side of the jaw.

Both blows had force enough to accomplish Bob's purpose without further ado, and both of them went through space limited to six or eight inches. Neither could be called a swing or an old-fashioned blow, as both were delivered quickly and at close range with the power of a sledge wielded by a brawny blacksmith.

Corbett could not get to his feet, and afterwards acknowledged that it was the blow to the body that beat him.

BAD DECISION

Previous to this encounter Fitzsimmons had fairly beaten Tom Sharkey with a short-arm stomach blow, but referee Wyatt Earp called it a foul and Fitz was thereby robbed of the big end of the purse.

But among the witnesses of his fights with both Sharkey and Corbett was James J. Jeffries.

Jeffries, always a close observer, concluded without much hesitancy that the man who could avoid Fitz's half-arm jolts on the jaw and his short, hard body blows could beat him down. So when Jeffries made his first match with Fitz, he engaged Tommy Ryan, of Syracuse, one of the best boxers in the world as his spar partner.

In their training together at Allenhurst, N.J., Jeffries and Ryan laid their plans with great care. Ryan was forever stepping in close with the short jolts for the jaw and body while Jeffries, for the first time assuming the crouching attitude for which he was famous, avoided them with extreme cleverness. A week before the fight, Jeffries said:

"Fitz has whipped all of his men with that left-hand smash on the stomach. If he gets it on me, I'm likely to drop, but I shall take great care to keep out of reach.

"I know he will bore in for me, but I will stop him with the left and then when I've beat him up enough that way I'll put the right over to the jaw and out he'll go!"

Fitzsimmons held Jeffries cheaply. He had seen him fail to stop Bob Armstrong several months before, when the boilermaker weighed 240 pounds, and for that reason he was sure that he could beat the big fellow down with ease. So when the fight at Coney Island started June 9, 1899, Fitz rushed at Jeffries at the sound of the gong.

It was his plan to get in his left-hand solar plexus punch to the stomach as soon as possible, thus ending the mill

nishman was noted.

But he soon discovered that Jeffries' crouching attitude made it impossible for him to reach his stomach in any way. Then in a fit of desperation, Bob began wild swings for the head.

In a moment he forgot all about his short-arm jolts and went back to the style prevalent in the days of Dempsey, Sullivan, Kilrain and Paddy Ryan. This was what Jeffries wanted, for as Fitz came boring in with bulldog tenacity, Jeff jabbed him in the head with his left and knocked him flat in the second round.

Fitz, finding that he was up against a man who thoroughly understood his game, became rattled more and more as the fight proceeded until finally Jeffries won the championship.

Fitz had plenty of time to think it over after that. He went into retirement, but he could not help thinking that if he had trained more conscientiously he would have won.

In time he was itching for another mill, but he realized that he would have to fight his way into a new match with the big champion. With this idea in mind, he made matches with Ruhlin and Sharkey to take place within two weeks of each other.

Jim Corbett prepared Ruhlin and incidentally warned the burly Teuton that the most dangerous blow that he would have to look out for was the short-arm jolt for the solar plexus, which had killed Corbett's rise to fame at Carson City.

Ruhlin was a patient listener. He got into the ring fully aware that Fitz would be up to his old tricks.

In the first round Fitz indulged in old-fashioned swings for the head, which threw Ruhlin completely off his guard.

STOMACH BLOW

No sooner had the second round started than Fitz stepped in quickly with the left driven squarely into the solar plexus. So hard was this smash that it seemed as if Bob's fist went into Ruhlin's body up to the wrist. When he pulled it out Gus fell like a log.

"I told you to look out for that!" yelled Corbett, as Ruhlin gamely struggled to his feet after the ninth count and began to save himself by clinching. Ruhlin was a beaten man then and there, for the stomach blow had taken all the stamina out of him.

The big German was game to the core and fought on blindly in the next four rounds until Fitzsimmons finally caught him on the jaw with a six-inch jolt that put him out of business.

Then came Sharkey at Coney Island. Fitz did not waste any time with him, but landed a fearful left in the wind in the second round, which was followed with a tremendous smash that knocked Sharkey out.

Then Fitz was ready for Jeffries. He challenged him to battle within a week and offered to bet \$10,000 that he could stop the champion in six rounds. But Jeffries for some reason would not fight.

They did not make a match until two years had elapsed.

Fitz began training all over again and at the same time he devoted a great deal of work to perfecting the short stomach blow and the little jolt

damage in the past. But Jeffries understood his man.

Jeffries also realized that with his superior weight and punching power he could whip the Cornishman at his own game.

When they finally met in the ring at San Francisco in 1902, Jeffries was still crouching and Fitz found that he could not get to the boilermaker's body. He put in his jabs to Jim's face and made his nose bleed, but the vulnerable solar plexus was not within his reach.

It was at a moment when Bob was a trifle perplexed, not to say discouraged, that Jeffries suddenly straightened up and sent home a punch as accurately delivered as a bullet from a rifle. It landed squarely on the solar plexus.

Fitz gasped for breath and let his hands drop limp to his sides. Another smash on the jaw did the business and Fitz had been defeated precisely by the blows that he had so carefully originated more than ten years before.

"It was the solar plexus punch," said Fitz, after the mill. "Jeff had it down fine and I fell for it. It's the best blow of them all."

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FAMOUS GHOST

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people, not all of them fools, have been waiting to hear from him.

But at least one close friend, Clem Tamburrino, a faith healer from Philadelphia, claims to have made contact.

"The message," said Tamburrino, who worked six years with Ford at Fletcher's orders, "were all of a very personal nature."

He said Ford was still in a state of shock from his painful death ("they tried too hard to save him at the end") and was not yet ready for general communication.

Fletcher may have been sincerely concerned for Ford's health, but on several occasions during the partnership he said: "I have to stick with Ford as long as he needs me, but I wish he would die soon so I can get loose."

On one of many tape recordings now held by Tamburrino, Fletcher said more seriously: "When Ford dies, I will go onto other things. I have work to do."

Two weeks after Ford's death in Miami, another noted American psychic, Mrs. Dorothy Moore of Chicago, tried to contact Fletcher through her own "control," an 18th-Century Englishman named Ted.

"Fletcher is gone," Ted said, according to Mrs. Moore.

Another psychic, in Miami recently for a Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship seminar, smiled and added:

"But Arthur is over there now. For somebody, he is going to make a beautiful control."

When Arthur's ready, perhaps.

THE END

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