

# DRISCOLL vs. ATTELL BATTLE of GHOSTS

*Welshman Won But Abe Still Disputes It 36 Years After Greatest Exhibition of Skill Yet Seen in This Country*

By DANIEL M. DANIEL



*Tom O'Rourke, who handled Abe Attell in his battle with Jem Driscoll. The above shows Tom as he looked at the time.*

**I**N our long series of flashbacks of the greatest fights in the annals of the sport, from Jim Figg down to Joe Louis, we have apostrophized the Punch. Men ever have been worshippers of power, and the fighter with the ability to settle an issue with one swing of the arm, one well directed drive of the fist, has drawn the greater accolade.

To Jack Dempsey, Louis and John L. Sullivan, have gone the shriller praises.

But, just as man does not live by bread alone, so does boxing not live by the knockout punch alone.

The foundation stone of the game is skill. The basic strength of the sport is science. They used to call it the game of hit and get away.

You may thumb the pages of Nat Fleischer's ALL-TIME RING RECORD BOOK from now until July 4 and you won't find two shrewder ring generals, two more adroit boxers, two more beautiful exponents of the science of this game than Abe Attell, once featherweight champion of the world, and Jem Driscoll, the little Welshman who made himself the standout featherweight on the other side.

There are those who will tell you that Driscoll was the greatest boxer yet produced. Charley Harvey, who managed Jem Driscoll in his American tour, is one of those who held to this thesis.

You may talk about George Dixon, you may praise Attell

himself, you may talk about Kid McCoy, about the superior boxers England has developed. But Driscoll unquestionably was the king of them all. Imagine a man with Driscoll's science and Leonard's punch.

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**I**MAGINE, too, a ten-round fight between Attell and Driscoll. It is conceivable that in all the history of boxing, there never was the like of this engagement on the night of February 19, 1909, at the National Sporting Club in New York, for a demonstration of the finer points of what Damon Runyon likes to call the sour science.

Attell—Crafty, wily, a master feinter, a good hitter, never making a move unless there was a reason for it.

Driscoll—nimble, quick on his feet, a veritable sleight of hand artist—the hand is quicker than the eye.

In 1909, there was no legality to boxing in the state of New York. It was conducted on what was known as the membership basis. That was to protect organizations like the New York A.C., which held contests between amateurs, and whose members engaged in informal bouts in their own gymnasium.

The National Sporting Club was closer to the legal membership scheme than the other outfits operating in New York in those days. The locale of its contests was the old Fiss, Doerr and Carroll horse auction stables. There were plush covered ropes around the ring, and those ropes gave the tonal impetus to the joint.

In any event, with an official decision barred, Attell and Driscoll fought through ten of the most profoundly scientific and thrilling rounds it has been the good fortune of New York fight fans to see.

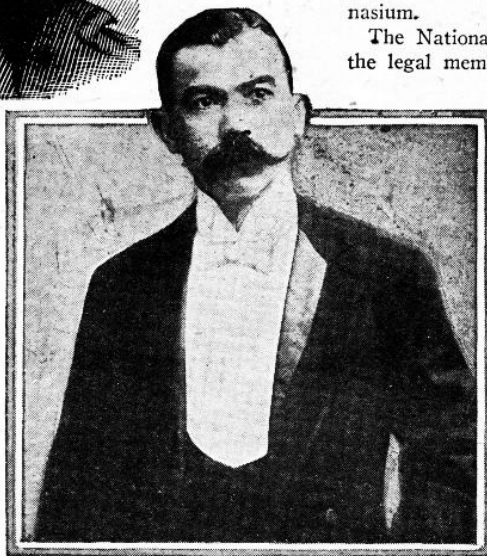
When it was all over, some said, "Abe took him." Others were just as certain that Jem had earned

the verdict. It was a case of taking your choice.

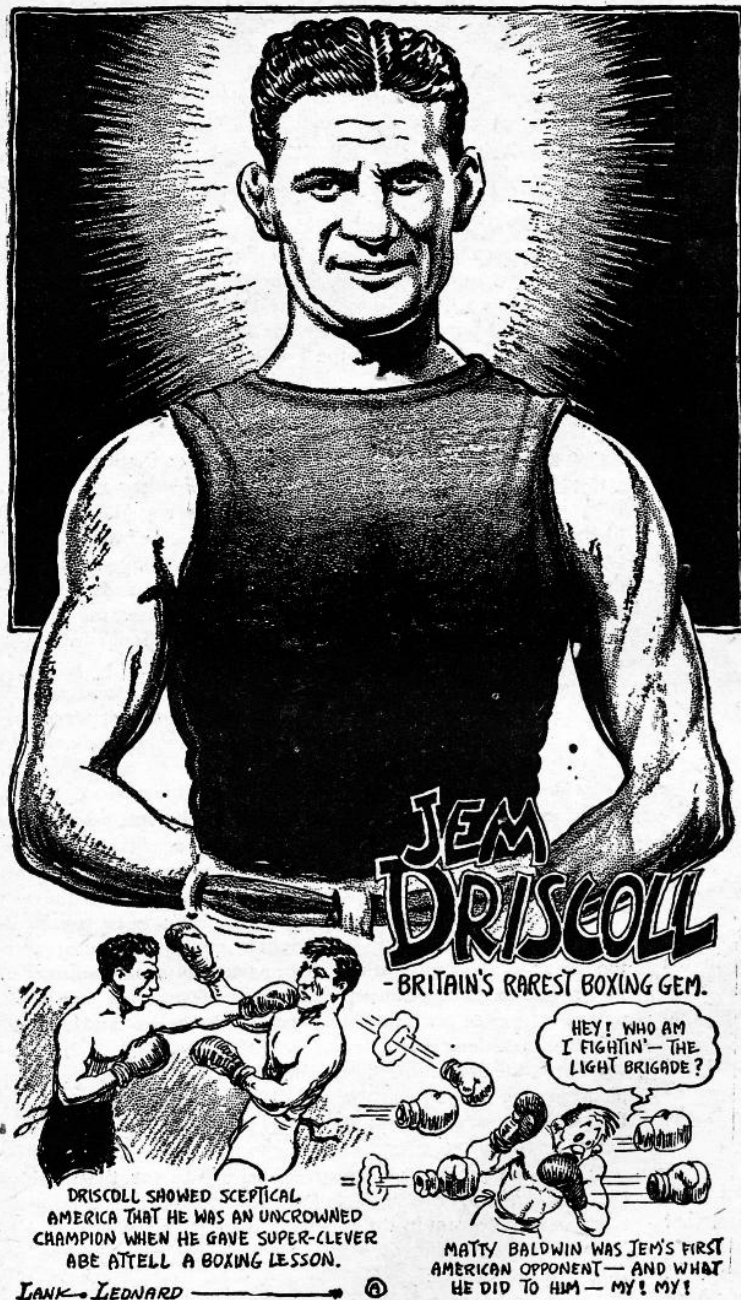
In fact, the Old Guard still is squabbling over the decision. I saw the fight and gave it to Driscoll. However, had the house been canvassed, the result probably would have been close to a draw.

Those who bet on fights in that era went by the verdicts of the sports pages. Here's how the experts lined up on the morning of February 20, 1909:

*Evening Journal*, Driscoll; *Evening World*, Driscoll; *Morning Telegraph*, Attell; *New York Times*, Driscoll; *New York Tribune*, Driscoll; *New York Press*, Driscoll; *Morning World*,



*Charley Harvey who brought Jem Driscoll to America and took charge of his U.S. campaign.*



Attell responded, "The worst I could get was a draw. I did most of the forcing and my punches had more steam behind them. In 20, I could stop Jem. I'd like to meet him again over the longer distance."

\* \* \*

WELL, Attell and Driscoll never did meet again. The American's tenure as the featherweight champion of the world was not destined to be a lengthy one. On February 22, 1912, at Los Angeles, Attell was outpointed in 20 rounds by Johnny Kilbane, who was to reign as king of the class until 1923, when Gene Criqui, of France, knocked him out in six rounds in New York—Criqui the young man, Kilbane a shadow of his onetime resplendent self.

Attell, who was 25 years of age when he met Driscoll in the horse fair, became the recognized featherweight king on April 30, 1908, when he knocked out Brooklyn Tommy Sullivan of St. Louis, in the fourth round, in San Francisco.

Abe could have become the champion on October 13, 1904, in St. Louis, but he lost to Sullivan on a foul. That ended in the fifth.

Driscoll was 28 years of age when he outpointed Attell. The fight was one of a series of ten which the Welshman fought in the United States. He counted on coming back for a second tour but for some reason this was restricted to one contest, with Pal Moore. It was a six round, no-decision affair in Philadelphia, on May 25, 1910.

Driscoll's ten fight tour started with a six round bout with Matty Baldwin, rugged Boston lightweight, in New York. Jem took that one, and the next bout, as well. That was with Grover Hayes, a six in Philadelphia.

That he could hit as well as box, Driscoll proved in his third American appearance, in which he stopped Charley Griffin in Boston, in the eleventh heat.

On December 29, 1908, Driscoll met Baldwin a second time, in 12 rounds in Boston, and it was the same old story. Jem got the duke.

Driscoll started his 1909 campaign in Boston on January 19 and beat Hayes in 12. Nine days later the Briton took on the rugged Johnny Marto, New York lightweight, and gave him a boxing lesson in ten rounds.

Tommy Langdon was beaten in a six rounder, the highly interesting Leach Cross, New York contender for the lightweight championship, was whipped in ten, and then came the grand climax, the fight with Attell.

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Driscoll; *New York Sun*, Driscoll; *New York American*, Driscoll; *New York Herald*, non-committal.

Against the preponderance of journalistic opinion in favor of the Welshman, there was Joe Humphreys' verdict of a draw, Tom O'Rourke's favoring Attell, and Jack McGuigan's leaning toward Abe. O'Rourke was in Abe's corner.

The *Brooklyn Times* was of the opinion that Attell could not possibly get any worse than a draw.

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HOWEVER, it went on to explain that Driscoll had led on points, but the featherweight champion had advantages in other respects that count in arriving at a decision in a ring contest. How Driscoll could lead on points in a ten round fight that ended with both men on their feet, and still get no better than a draw, was not explained coherently.

The day after, as he stood on the deck of the steamship *St. Paul*, headed for England, Driscoll said, "I always have believed myself faster than any man of my weight in the world, and I was confident that if I ever got Attell into a ring I would do what I did to him last night—everything but stop him."

DRISCOLL was a tremendous favorite no matter where he appeared in this country. He was greased lightning in the ring, and an affable, easily approached bloke out of the squared circle. In New York, he did his training up at Dal Hawkins' place in the Bronx, and Jem would sit around and talk about his ring experiences by the hour.

Not a gabby guy by any means. But if he liked you and the atmosphere was right, he would reminisce. And his stories were very much worth while, for Jem came up the hard way, boxing in booths at circuses, and the like.

Driscoll served with the British Army in the first World War, for four years. After he had boxed a 20 round draw with Owen Moran for the British title on January 27, 1913, Jem did not make another ring appearance until March 10, 1919, when he put on a four rounder with the faded veteran Pedlar Palmer.

On October 20, 1919, when Driscoll was 38 years of age, he wound up his ring career with a contest with Charley Ledoux, the French champion. Ledoux stopped the oldtimer in sixteen rounds.

On January 31, 1925, Jem Driscoll died of pneumonia in the city in which he was born, Cardiff, Wales.

About Attell, you doubtless know all the details. Born in San Francisco on February 22, 1884, Abe developed on the sidewalks of that city. In 1900, he went into the ring and for the next two years piled up knockouts in profusion.

On August 24, 1901, the comparatively inexperienced Attell held George Dixon to a draw in ten rounds in Denver.

Shortly afterward, they went 20 heats to a stalemate in Cripple Creek, but in their third meeting, over the 15-round distance, at St. Louis, Abe gave the Negro a beating.

A 20-round triumph over Frankie Neil in 1906, a 25-round draw with the scientific Owen Moran in 1908, a 15-round draw with Battling Nelson—these stood out in the Attell record as he fought his way through the years and around the country, right into the ten-rounder with Driscoll.

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ATTELL was much too canny for his own good. He got the reputation of setting up opponents. After the fight with Driscoll, for example, it was charged that, had Abe wanted to cut loose, he could have whipped the Welshman decisively.

"The inference was drawn that Attell deliberately stalled," said the *Brooklyn Times*. "In other words, he was not trying very hard with the end in view of showing up the Britisher in a real battle."

If Attell stalled that night, then the Twentieth Century Limited in full flight for Chicago is stalling.

Not that Abe did not, on occasion, stall with the plan of getting the other man into a more lucrative fight. Attell always was doping things out that way. He had a knack of saving up opponents for the richer haul.

Attell appeared to be giving everything he had against Driscoll. Some of the critics said that while the Briton scored the greater number of points, he boxed with fingers outstretched in his gloves and could not really hurt his man. Abe, on the other hand, was swinging hard and hurting. He had Jem's face and body rather welted after the tenth round.

Though the referee was not permitted to give a decision, Charley White, Old Eagle Eye, who was the third man in the ring, confided the next day that he believed Attell had won. Johnny White, referee of the preliminary card, also expressed the opinion that the Briton had been whipped.

For years and years after the fight, whenever oldtimers got together, discussion waxed hot.

Attell fought many a battle, but that Driscoll affair is the one canker in his memory.

\* \* \*

ABE will tell you that the one man who knew fights in those days was O'Rourke, and he will cite Tom's opinion, that Attell won. Here is the O'Rourke thesis:

"Sports writers for years have had their say about the fight between Attell and Driscoll. For some unknown reason they have tried to belittle Abe's ability in every way—most of them doing it by hearsay, as they did not see the fight. I think it is due to Attell's aggressive attitude toward the writers. However, I was in a position as a second to Attell during this contest to be able to judge it fairly well.

"I did not second Attell through any love for him, but Senator Tim Sullivan, who was my partner during the Horton law days, pleaded with me to second Attell, stating that he had a large sum of money wagered on Attell to win, the decision being left to three men who were chosen between himself and the man wagering with him, as no decision could be given by the referee.

"I consented to second Abe after Big Tim sent for him to come to his apartment in the Occidental Hotel, where I went over the situations that might occur during the fight. I told Attell that Driscoll was strictly a head fighter, and that he would force him to fight that way, as Attell was also a head fighter, and that he must change his style and tactics during training, and learn to fight for the body, which he did.

"He agreed to follow my instructions throughout the fight, and he had Driscoll on the verge of a knockout on two occasions—in the sixth and seventh rounds—especially in the seventh,

when Driscoll leaned through the ropes while his seconds held his head, and vomited on some of the ringsiders who had to scramble out of the way.

"It was a great scientific fight, and there was no doubt in my mind that, without favoring Attell in the least, that he won. Senator Sullivan collected his wager the next day."

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DRISCOLL and Attell both weighed under 125 pounds for that memorable demonstration of skill and science. The beam was set at 125 and Jem did not tip it. Attell scaled 123½.

What bothered Attell most during the thirty minutes of action was Driscoll's famous double left. He had a habit of shooting his left and then, quicker than the eye could catch it, shooting the left right back again.

Rube Goldberg, now a famous cartoonist, was a sports expert for the old *Evening Mail* in New York in 1909, and it is interesting to go back to the files of that defunct sheet for Rube's deathless prose about the dance of the ghosts. Goldberg wrote:

"While neither of the little fighters was any the worse off at the end of the final round, with the exception of a little swelling in Attell's right eye, Driscoll had the advantage in a greater number of rounds and should be entitled to the verdict if any is to be given. He danced in and out of Abe's defense, tapping him time after time with that annoying straight left. It landed almost every time it started.

"The bout was a boxing affair pure and simple, and Driscoll had the best of the boxing. Attell landed with greater force than the Briton, and probably can beat him in a longer fight. That's where the tough part comes in.

"It does not appear very just to give the featherweight title to Driscoll when everybody who saw the fight will acknowledge that Abe can land the Welshman in a greater distance. A professional championship involves all the qualities straight down the line—science, punch, speed, stamina, headwork and the rest.

"The punch and the staying qualities are not to be considered as important factors of last night's battle. The men were too clever to allow any little things of that nature to disturb them in ten rounds. The elements count with clever men only when nature refuses to obey the commands of the brain. And that can only be in a long fight.

"If it is the consensus of opinion that Driscoll takes the championship over to England with him, the public will not be satisfied with the arrangement until the men have met again in a longer battle.

"When the prayers of the assembled crowd for the finish of the semi-windup were answered, J. Humphreys announced that there was a telegram in the house for John Jasper, whoever he is. Then the usual string of fistic celebrities was brought into the ring and introduced.

"There were about 3000 people in the house, all legitimate club members. Many fond hopes were blasted at the front door when the special officers put the duck number on the friends of the friends of the friends of the people connected with the boxing game. Even the high hat stall wouldn't work. One man tried to pass himself off for Bill Taft, but they asked for his membership card just the same. You had to go disguised as a vacuum to beat it.

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"THERE was no preliminary haggling over small details when the men entered the ring. They were called together by Referee Charley White, took their instruction like a couple of field generals, shook hands and tore in. There was lots and lots of class to the whole works. Even the ushers looked as if they ought to be working in the department of archaeology in some first-class university. It was a treat. Tom O'Rourke was in Attell's corner. Tom's reception by the crowd was not very cordial. Charley Harvey's walrus decoration spread over Driscoll's corner like a Hawaiian palm.

"At the end of the first round the buzz of voices all over the house sounded like the rumbling of an elevated train. The speedy work of the two cleverest little men in the world took everybody's breath away. Attell looked

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# Driscoll vs. Attell Battle of Ghosts

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more the finished boxer than Driscoll. He looked more dangerous. The Welshman appeared a little uncertain dancing around the champion and looking for an opening to shoot in his quick-fire straight left.

"Many seated about the ring thought surely Abe had too much ring generalship for the Briton, and expected to see Driscoll suffer his first defeat since his arrival in this country. But, alas for the followers of the great Abe, such was not to be the case. Driscoll made a pretty duck in the first round, and Attell slipped to his knee from the force of his wild swing. This was the only time during the fight that either man connected with the floor.

\* \* \*

"THE first two rounds were about even, but Abe still looked very formidable and dangerous. Driscoll only used his left, and seemed to be trying to get a good line on Attell before pulling any rough stuff. The first three rounds belonged to anybody, but Driscoll took a decided lead in the fourth. He seemed to be getting more confidence, and started a spirited jabbing campaign on Attell's right eye.

"Driscoll's blows did not seem to bother Abe, but they landed with painful regularity. They seemed like taps. Attell landed several good punches in the sixth. This and the eighth were the only two decisive rounds that belonged to Attell. He had the punch, but he couldn't connect.

"Driscoll's seconds applied the champagne bath in the eighth. Attell got in a few good right body punches in the ninth, but Jem continued to jab away at that eye. The swelling was a fair size by this time.

"Driscoll outboxed Abe in the last round. He danced around like a headless chicken and shot in his left from everywhere and nowhere. Attell couldn't locate him.

"There was no one decisive blow in the whole fight. At no time was either man in distress. It was simply an elegant display of science, with no thrilling or quiet moments. Nobody went crazy with excitement, and nobody lost interest for a single moment. But it was all there and certainly worth while seeing."

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THIRTY-SIX years have elapsed since that grand demonstration of boxing skill.

Did Attell win it? He is around, yet, in

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New York, to insist with vehemence that he did.

Did Driscoll win? He is up in high Valhalla telling how he did, to John L., Dixon, Fitz, and the rest of that famous crew.

Be certain, however, that as long as fights are written about, there will be copious literature concerning the meeting of the masters of legerdemain.

The story of the ten rounds, blow by blow, is as follows:

FIRST ROUND—Driscoll was short with his left, and Attell ripped left and right to the wind. Driscoll's left went to face three times, and Attell sent left to wind and crowded Jem to the ropes. Attell misses two swings as Driscoll sidesteps, and the American falls against the ropes. He bounded back laughing. He hit Jem with a left to the stomach. Jem's lightning left found Attell's mouth. It was Driscoll's round.

SECOND ROUND—Attell's left went to the stomach, and Driscoll jabbed left on mouth. The American ripped right to stomach and sent his left to the Englishman's jaw. Driscoll put two lefts on nose and mouth. Jem jabbed three lefts to the eye and the last one on the mouth, which rocked Attell's head. They swapped lefts to head. Driscoll's blocking was marvelous and Attell's not a shade behind. Attell got to the wind with a good left. Attell's round by a shade.

THIRD ROUND—Attell's right reached the ear and Driscoll jabbed nose and mouth. Attell sent three lefts to the mouth and Driscoll jabbed a left on nose and mouth. Jem hooked a left to the eye and battered the stomach with right. Attell blocked two lefts, but Driscoll's right hook landed solidly on the jaw. A swap of lefts on face was followed by Driscoll's right to the jaw. This staggered the American, and Driscoll was in like lightning with three lefts on head. Driscoll's round.

FOURTH ROUND—Jem staggered Attell with a solid right on jaw. Attell rushed, but the Englishman ducked out of harm's way. Driscoll put two lefts to Attell's face and shook him up with a solid right on ear. Attell reached the stomach with both hands. Jem cut Attell's eye with a left and then put the left to the wind. After a break they exchanged lefts on the mouth. Driscoll's left went to Attell's nose and to the mouth. Driscoll's round.

FIFTH ROUND—Attell jabbed left to the nose, and Jem put Attell to the ropes with a left on the ear. Driscoll hit Attell on the ear with a right swing. They swapped lefts on the head, and when Attell ducked a swing Driscoll sent one to the kidneys. Jem's left shot to the face, and then Attell jarred Jem with a stiff left on the jaw. Both landed short-arm lefts on the head, and after a clinch Jem sent left to the bad eye and nose. Driscoll smashed the American's eye three times with his left. Driscoll's round.

SIXTH ROUND—Driscoll blocked a left, and hooked a left to Attell's bad eye. Attell jabbed nose with left, and Driscoll came back with two lefts to head. Attell hooked two lefts to jaw. Jem slowed up a moment, then came back with two sharp lefts on face. Attell's left went to stomach, and Driscoll planted a good left on Attell's wind. Driscoll landed left twice on the eye. Attell hooked a left on ear, then put two light lefts on the face. Jem smashed Attell's eye at the bell. Attell's round.

SEVENTH ROUND—Attell's left was blocked, but his right went solid on Jem's ear. Driscoll came back with a left on nose. Attell put a left on nose, then to the jaw, staggering Driscoll. Attell battered the stomach, and Jem jabbed left to the mouth. Attell sent a right to the heart. Driscoll walloped the kidneys, then sent three lefts to the eye, nose, and mouth. Attell's round.

EIGHTH ROUND—Attell's left was blocked and Jem jabbed left on mouth. Attell landed a left and right on head, then a swap of lefts on face was followed by Jem with a left to Attell's chin and a right on ear. Attell put a left to jaw and crossed a good right on ear. Driscoll darted two lefts to face; Attell replied with a left and right. Jem was short with a left, but after Attell got to the eye with a left Driscoll landed two lefts lightly on face. Attell put two to the stomach with both hands, and they were locked at the bell. Honors even.

NINTH ROUND—Driscoll rocked Attell's head with a left on mouth, and Attell staggered Jem with two left hooks on the jaw. Jem sent left to nose lightly and then to the mouth. Attell jabbed mouth with left, and Jem answered in kind. A swap of light lefts to face followed; then Jem sent a left on jaw and a right to the ear. Driscoll put left to the stomach, and Attell ripped left to the wind. The Englishman put a wicked right on chin and followed it with a swing to jaw. Attell clinched and they were hammering the stomach at the bell. Driscoll's round.

TENTH ROUND—Both men were strong. Jem put a light left on mouth, and after a clinch Driscoll sent a left to Attell's bad eye. There was another clinch and Driscoll hooked left and right on chin and ear. The American landed left on chest, and Driscoll hooked a solid left on nose, and followed it with a right on ear. Attell's left was checked and Driscoll hammered stomach. Driscoll ducked a wicked swing and they clinched. After the break Jem shot three lefts to the face and Attell clinched and hammered stomach. Jem sent a left to the mouth. It was Driscoll's round.