



STORY OF A CONTENTED MAN

*Eddie Peirce, Flint recreation director,
one of many fighters who beat Skid Row.*

by LARRY GUSTIN

FLINT, Mich.—He's a nothing, this kid. He comes out of nowhere with blazing fists. Suddenly he's somebody. His name is in lights. People stop him on the streets, shake his hand. His picture is in all the papers. There's plenty of money, now, for cars, booze, women.

It's a few years later. He shuffles down the street with a funny, distorted gait. Walks into a skid-row bar. A guy at the bar nudges his buddy. "See that punchy bum over there," he grins. "I remember when he almost won the title. . . ."

A familiar stereotype, this picture of the former boxer. Sadly true in a few cases. But not in most. And it's time the boxing public was made aware of men who led successful lives after their fists retired.

Take Eddie Peirce, for instance. Maybe you'll recall the name. He was a ranking middleweight in the late 1930's.

Eddie wasn't a fancy Dan. His punching power didn't make strong men quake. But he knew all the tricks and fought tough guys like Tommy Farr and future middleweight kings Ken Overlin and Billy Soose.

Boxing shouldn't forget Eddie Peirce. What he did after World War II ended his fighting days—and nearly his life—makes his story an inspiration for boxers who are nearing the end.

Peirce didn't beat Farr, Overlin, or Soose—

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Above, Peirce, as he is today, with his beautiful wife Claire. Below, Eddie in his fighting days.

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and a promised title fight with Freddy Steele didn't materialize. But he emerged from a career spanning more than 200 professional bouts with all his marbles, and memories of fame and fast-spent money.

The South African had never completed grammar school. He found he needed a college degree for recreation supervisory jobs. So in 1960 he was graduated from Arizona State University at age 48, completing the four-year course in two and a half, while holding down a full-time job.

Today he is a senior supervisor for the Flint Park and Recreation Board and helps handle the city's Golden Gloves program. At 51, he lives in a new home with his wife Claire, and is a respected member of the community.

"I've boxed on four continents," he says. "But I'm content in Flint, and hope to spend the rest of my life here."

Relaxing in his Cranwood Drive home, Peirce doesn't look the part of a former fighter. His clipped British accent helps belie the fact.

But Eddie took a lot of punishment in his day. He was a spoiler. Some went so far as to call him a "dirty" fighter.

"I never started the rough stuff but I knew how to give it back," he recalls. "I didn't have a great punch—once knocked a man out in Michigan with a left hook and it surprised me nearly as much as him. But I didn't lose more than 25 or 30 of between 200 and 300 fights."

Life for Eddie Peirce began in a little town near Capetown, South Africa. His father was killed in a gold mining accident when Eddie was 12. That's when he quit school and started working.

He was a natural athlete, a fine soccer player. His ring career got off to an inauspicious start. He didn't begin amateur boxing until he was 19, and lost his first two bouts. That he didn't quit then was a significant fact. It showed that here was a boy with a will as tough as his body.

Eddie learned the ropes fast. He was soon middleweight champion of his province. Then middleweight champion of South Africa and a member of his country's Olympic team. He won a bronze medal in the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. He turned pro that year and won the South African middleweight title.

Winning the country's light heavyweight crown in his next outing turned out to be more of a bane than a boom. For when he left for Europe in 1933, he was considered a light heavy, though still only a 160-pounder. He never completely lost that label.

In England and Europe, the hungry lad learned that the more he fought, the more money he made. He was durable. He could fight often. One year he fought 60 times, sometimes twice a night.



World Welterweight champion Emile Griffith enjoyed a night of fun recently at Palisades Amusement Park in Cliffside Park, N.J. Here he chats with Johnny Rinaldi (left) Asst. Director of the Park, and Publicity Chief Sol Abrams.

When he ran into heavyweight Tommy Farr in England, he was fighting for the third time that week. Farr won a close 15-round decision, though he outweighed Eddie by nearly 40 pounds. A year later Farr extended Joe Louis to 15 rounds.

Peirce was a name fighter, now. A middleweight title fight was promised if he came to the U.S. He came. He broke a rib just before a contract with then middleweight champ Freddy Steele could be signed.

But Eddie was ranked well up among the world's top middleweights. He admits he had other chances to move into championship circles. They were lost when he dropped close decisions to Overlin and Soose a year before each won New York versions of the disputed middleweight crown.

By 1942 he was on the downgrade and the war made it final. That year he married Claire, a beautiful girl he met in Paterson, N.J.

Two war incidents nearly made Claire a widow. In Europe a jeep in which Peirce and three others were riding hit a mine. The others were killed. Eddie remembers flying through the air toward a big tree and thinking, "Claire will get a telegram in the morning."

Rescuers found him trying to help the others but he remembers nothing until he awoke in a hospital with serious pelvic injuries. In Italy he suffered shrapnel wounds that left his back pitted with scars.

Eddie won an Army championship and then decided it wasn't fair for him to compete against amateur competition. No longer a fighter, he directed an Army boxing team during the war and after hostilities ended in Europe he was given a recreation director role to help ease the boredom of American troops.

"This is where I found my life's work," he says. "I decided to stay in recreation work and the Army paved my way for a civilian job as recreation director of Palmyra, N.Y."

Eddie remained in Palmyra five years, then took the post as recreation director for a county park system in Arizona. A

college education would be necessary for advancement, he discovered.

Instead of enrolling for high school classes, Eddie decided to give the high school qualification test a whirl. He passed with flying colors, a fact which surprised him more than his one-punch knockout. Then he zipped through college courses, recovering from early difficulty with B-plus work his final year.

While the Arizona State recreation degree opened new doors, Eddie learned he would have to leave the state. Doctors diagnosed a skin growth on his face as cancer and advised him to head for a cooler climate. He chose Michigan.

"The skin cancer is supposed to be licked," he says hopefully. "But I have no particular fear of death. I've lived a lot."

The great tragedy of the Peirces' married life has been their lack of children. Two babies were stillborn, another lived five days.

Although he insists he never was knocked out, Eddie was floored often and hit plenty. He absorbed terrific head punishment with no apparent ill effects.

"Boxers get punchy today because they aren't in condition," he says. "Their neck and jaw muscles aren't strong enough. I also have a theory that a man who takes a lot of little jars in gym work isn't nearly so susceptible to brain damage when he takes a hard punch."

Although Eddie still has his scrapbooks, and shelves filled with trophies, he can make you believe his statement, "I'm not living in the past."

He lounged back on his davenport, took a sip of beer, and reflected: "I'll admit I miss the fame. But I think I've adjusted well to the relative obscurity. I love it here. There's culture in this town and the people are civic-minded. I've had a lot of home towns, but I hope to make this one my last."

Eddie Peirce, you see, is a contented man.

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EDDIE PEIRCE

(Irish)

(Sometimes spelled Pierce in newspaper fight coverage)

Born: 1914, Capetown, South Africa
Height: 6 ft
Weight: 160 Lbs.
Activity: 1932-1942
First Rated: February 1940
Last Rated: April 1940
Months Rated: 2
Best Rating: 10
Sources: (1) 1943 Ring Record Book
 (2) Opponent Records
 (3) New York Times

Representing his Country of South Africa, he was a bronze medalist at 160 lb. in the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, CA. He lost a decision to eventual gold medalist Carmen Barth of the United States. In early 1940 he was the 10th ranking middleweight in the world. He turned pro in 1932 and won the South African middleweight title. Many of his early bouts have gone unrecorded. It is estimated that he over 200 professional fights (campaigning on four continents). He settled and lived in Flint, MI after WW II.



TB KO WD WF D LD LF KOBV ND NC
 67 8 29 1 7 18 2 0 0 2

<u>1932</u>				
(Early record unavailable)				
<u>1933</u>				
Jul 1	Clyde Chastain, Johannesburg, So Afr.	D	10	
Nov 12	Del Fontaine, London, England	W PTS	15	
<u>1934</u>				
Jan 29	Jock McAvoy, Manchester, England	L PTS	12	
Jul 20	Frank Hough, London, England	L PTS	12	
Aug 8	Del Fontaine, London, England	W PTS	12	
Oct 14	Manuel Abrew, The Ring, Scotland	L DQ	3	
Oct 22	Tommy Farr, Bradford, England	L PTS	12	
Oct 29	Al Burke, Hull, England	L PTS	8	
<u>1936</u>				
	Bill Hardy, London, England	W PTS	12	
	George Black, United States	W PTS	10	
	Mike Bottome, United States	W PTS	10	
	Billy Hardy, London, England	W PTS	10	
	Frank Hough, London, England	W KO	18	
	(Is the round correct?)			
	Dai Jones, London, England	W PTS	10	
	Nestor Charlier, London, England	W KO	5	
	Frank Hough, London, England	W PTS	10	
	Ernie Simmons, London, England	W PTS	10	
	Descheemaker, London, England	W KO	2	
	Frank Hough, London, England	W PTS	12	
	Stafford Barton, London, England	L DQ	2	
	Stafford Barton, London, England	W PTS	12	
Apr 2	Erich Seelig, London, England	D	10	
Apr 6	Harry Lister, Falmouth, England	W TKO	6	
May 25	Erich Seelig, London, England	L PTS	10	
Nov 18	George Black, Milwaukee, WI	W PTS	10	
Dec 9	Ralph Chong, Chicago, IL	W PTS	10	
Dec 18	Jack Chase, Denver, CO (AKA Young Joe Louis)	W PTS	10	
<u>1937</u>				
Feb 10	Joe Jaramillo, Denver, CO	W PTS	10	
Apr 30	Frankie Misko, Chicago, IL	W KO	6	
May 6	Al Diamond, Denver, CO	W PTS	10	
Oct 11	Kid Tunero, London, England	W DQ	4	
<u>1938</u>				
Jan 13	Darky Ellis, West Ham, England	W PTS	12	
Feb 24	Charley Bundy, West Ham, England	W KO	9	
May 16	Jack Hyams, London, England	L PTS	12	
Aug 1	Darky Ellis, Bournemouth, England	D	12	

1939

Jan 10	Paul Mahoney, Rochester, NY	W PTS	10
Feb 13	Harvey Massey, Newark, NJ	D	10
Feb 24	Al Wardlow, New York, NY	D	6
May 1	Sinclair Potter, Newark, NJ	W KO	2
May 12	Gene Buffalo, New York, NY	W PTS	6
Jun 27	Buddy Ryan, Garfield, NJ	W PTS	8
Jul 7	Ken Overlin, Long Branch, NJ	L PTS	10
Oct 23	Eddie Dreher, Washington, DC	W PTS	8
Nov 2	Ben Brown, Baltimore, MD	L PTS	8
Dec 20	Tony Cisco, Philadelphia, PA	L PTS	10

1940

Jan 29	Gene Buffalo, Philadelphia, PA	W KO	8
Mar 11	Tony Cisco, Philadelphia, PA	L PTS	8
Apr 4	Larry Russell, Atlantic City, NJ	W PTS	10
May 15	Billy Soose, Scranton, PA	L PTS	10
Jul 24	Bull Santos, Scranton, PA	D	4
Aug 9	Bobby Jones, Atlantic City, NJ	L PTS	8
Sep 18	Ken Overlin, Norfolk, VA	L PTS	10
Oct 18	Charley Burley, Pittsburgh, PA	L PTS	10
Nov 13	Gene Buffalo, Philadelphia, PA	L PTS	10

1941

Jan 7	Frankie Nelson, Portland, ME	L PTS	10
Mar 9	Ben Brown, Miami, FL	W PTS	10
Mar 14	Al Gilbert, West Palm Beach, FL	D	10
Apr 7	Young Allen, Atlanta, GA	W PTS	10
Apr 29	Antonio Fernandez, White Plains, NY	NC	5
Jul 25	Eddie Guerra, Long Branch, NJ	W PTS	10
Jun 24	Ted Lowry, Bangor, ME	W PTS	10
Aug 18	Ted Lowry, New Bedford, MA	W PTS	10

1942

Feb 27	Lloyd Marshall, Sacramento, CA	L PTS	10
Apr 29	Harvey Massey, Bangor, ME	NC	7
May 4	Phil Norman, Newark, NJ	W PTS	8
May 29	Johnny Clark, Paterson, NJ	W PTS	8
Jul 13	Vinnie Vines, Newark, NJ	L PTS	10

- MILITARY SERVICE WORLD WAR II
 - RETIRED FROM BOXING AFTER BEING DISCHARGED
 AND SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES

The following appears in the 1943 RRB

<u>1936</u>				
Dec 17	Teddy Yarosz, Pittsburgh, PA	L PTS	10	
	Yarosz beat South African Eddie Maguire on that date			

THIS RECORD IS NOT CONSIDERED COMPLETE.
 ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS ARE WELCOME!