

HERB GOLDMAN

RYAN-McCOY WAS A MIDDLEWEIGHT TITLE BOUT

Another missing piece has been unearthed in the history of world championship boxing.

That Charles (Kid) McCoy did not win the world welterweight title when he knocked out Tommy Ryan on March 2, 1896 has been known for at least ten years. The McCoy-Ryan contest was not referred to, at the time, as a world title bout; neither man weighed in within the welter limit (McCoy, 155; Ryan, 148); and contemporary sources continued to refer to Ryan as the world welterweight champion after McCoy knocked him out.

McCoy, however, held the middleweight title, stopping Australia's Dan Creedon, who failed to answer the bell for round 16 of a scheduled 25-round bout at the Puritan Club, Long Island City, N.Y., in December, 1897. This information was contained in the last several editions of *The Ring Record Book*.

Now, however, it appears McCoy, rather than winning the vacant title in that bout, was, in fact, *defending* his world middleweight title. According to Chris Greyvenstein's *The Fighters*, a comprehensive history of boxing in South Africa, McCoy visited Johannesburg in 1896, already claiming the world middleweight title, and defended same by knocking out Billy Doherty at the Johannesburg Amphitheatre on December 26th. (Weights: McCoy, 157; Doherty, 157 1/2. Clem D. Webb, referee.)

Greyvenstein says McCoy claimed the title as a result of having knocked out Tommy Ryan after Fitzsimmons "relinquished" the crown to campaign among the heavyweights. Greyvenstein himself disallows McCoy's claim, since the Kid "had fought Ryan

specifically for the latter's world welterweight title. . . .
(McCoy) was certainly not the official champion at the time of
his fight with Doherty."

The Fighters was published in 1981. Since that time,
research into contemporary newspapers has established that the
McCoy-Ryan fight was not for Ryan's world welterweight title,
though Ryan was, indeed, the welter champ. Now the *Brooklyn
Standard Union*, a paper not available for research in Manhattan
until fairly recently, offers still more information.

Here is the headline and opening paragraph of the *Standard
Union* report on the McCoy-Ryan fight of March 2, 1896:

A CLEVER BOXER

"Kid" McCoy Gains A Decisive Victory Over Tommy Ryan
They Fought Fifteen Rounds
And Then Ryan Had To Relinquish The Title of Middleweight
Champion With Which He Had Clothed Himself One Week Ago--
McCoy Is A Tip-Topper--Ryan Severely Punished--His Opponent
Came Out of The Fray Without A Mark

One week ago, Tommy Ryan of Syracuse, N.Y., proclaimed
himself middleweight champion of the world. When he issued
that proclamation he had never fought in the middleweight
class, having made an envious reputation among the welter-
weights. Mr. Ryan has of late so increased in avoirdupois
that it was impossible for him to fight in any class other
than the middleweight, and there being no recognized middle-
weight champion--Mr. Fitzsimmons having left that class when
he fought Peter Maher for the heavyweight championship--Mr.
Ryan took upon his own shoulders the responsibility of de-
fending that title. Last night at the Empire Athletic Club
in Maspeth, he made a vain attempt to retain the title with
which he had clothed himself only a week ago, but to the
surprise of four-fifths of the knowing ones, Mr. Ryan of
Syracuse, after fighting gamely for fifteen rounds, was
compelled to relinquish the championship to a comparatively
newcomer in the ring, Charles (Kid) McCoy of Memphis, Tenn.

Ryan, severely punished from the eighth round on, was
knocked out in 1:54 of the 15th. Tim Hurst, referee. Frank
Freeman, timekeeper. Charles Harvey, announcer. The attendance
was about 2,500.

The Fitzsimmons-Maher fight, incidentally, held across the border from Langtry, Texas, was looked upon as a legitimate world title bout at the time, Corbett having blessed Maher's fight with Steve O'Donnell as a title contest after announcing his retirement from the ring in 1895. (Maher knocked out O'Donnell in the first round and was dispatched by Fitzsimmons in the same amount of frames.)

The succession of the world middleweight title under Queensberry Rules should read as follows:

1878-1880	Dennis Harrington
1880-1883	William Sheriff
1883-1886	Vacant
1886-1891	Nonpareil Jack Dempsey
1891-1896	Bob Fitzsimmons
1896-1898	Charles (Kid) McCoy
1898-1904	Tommy Ryan

Ryan retired at the end of 1904. The history of the world middleweight championship from that point until 1908 still needs more research. Work goes on . . . and on.

--Herbert G. Goldman