

The Night The Blacksmith Knocked Out The Human Freight Car

By: John Hibner

In the Guinness Book of Records one can look in the Boxing section to find different facts and oddities. There is the longest fight, shortest, largest gate, and the greatest weight difference in which known fighters participated -- which is 140 lbs. In April 30, 1900 at the Hercules Athletic Club in Brooklyn, New York; Bob Fitzsimmon, the former Middleweight and Heavyweight champion, meet Ed "The Human Freight Car" Dunkhorst in a scheduled 25 round bout. Dunkhorst stood six feet three inches and tipped the scales at over 300 pounds while Fitzsimmons at that time probably didn't weigh over 160 pounds.

Fitzsimmons has been considered by many writers over the years as one of the greatest fighters that ever entered the boxing ring. But who was Ed Dunkhorst?? He was one of the few men in the history of the heavyweight division who have been classified as "Giant" fighters. In most cases tremendous size and bulk have always been a handicap to these men rather than an asset to their ring careers. Also one must remember that size and heft aren't an index of ones ability to fight as many ring records show that fact to be true.

The largest man to put on gloves or fight in the bare-knuckle era was Charles Freeman, who has been called "The Giant of Giants". He was six feet ten inches tall and tipped the scales at 323 pounds. Freeman only fought twice and then called it quits. On both occasions he tangled up with William Perry, the "Tipton Slasher". In the first bout they fought a 70 round draw, and in the rematch Freeman won easily.

Other large men who have competed are -- Herr Jan Plaacke, who has been called "The Dutch Blubberman" who weighed 297 pounds. Plaacke came to the United States in the early 1900 after stories of his fighting abilities were very overated, but he turned out to be a curiosity more than a fighter. In his American debut he was matched with Kid McCoy on April 5, 1904 in Philadelphia. McCoy who weighed only 162 out him into mince-meat and knocked him out in a two round slaughter. Ron Tmelletierro stood seven feet and weighed 270 pounds won all of his eleven fights by knockout, but then decided not to fight any more and then retired.

But there have been two of these "giants" that have won the heavyweight championship. Jess Willard, six foot, six and one quarter inches tall and weighing 250 pounds, defeated the legendary and contraversial Jack Johnson. That fight was held on April 5, 1915 in Havana, Cuba and Willard knocked out Johnson in the 26th round. this fight has left many doubts lay on the canvas and shielded his eyes from the bright sun has he was counted out. Was the fight Fixed?? Today know one knows!!

The other "giant" was Primo Carnera from Italy who weighted 265 pounds and stood six feet eleven inches. He had 77 bouts; won 60 by knockout, but like Plaacke he was a curiosity that people wanted to see fight. But the Italians rise to the championship level wasn't because

of his enormous size -- it was due to his tremendous improvement in his ability to box and to hit with authority by his trainers.

Yet when he fought Jack Sharkey on June 29, 1932, for the heavyweight championship; he wasn't given much of a chance to win. The sports writers played up the fact that Sharkey beat him handily two years ago, and that an inept fighter by the name of Jim Maloney suffered no damage from Carnera in two ten round bouts. But he was an improving fighter and fooled all skeptics by knocking out Sharkey in the sixth round with a right uppercut.

Ed Dunkhorst was born in Syracuse, New York in 1873 and turned pro in 1895. When he knocked out Charles Lawton in Elmira, New York in four rounds. His claim to fame in boxing circles was that he fought Bob Fitzsimmons, and that he had been one of Jim Jeffrie's sparring partners at his training camp in Elmhurst, New Jersey.

Another one of Dunkhorst opponents that was very well known at this time was Gus "The Akron Giant" Ruhlin, who was a leading contender in the heavyweight ranks. They battled at Coney Island on Sept. 19, 1898 and Ruhlin hammered Dunkhorst, who weighed 260 pounds, into submission in the twenty-second round.

Dunkhorst has been described as large and heavy; weighing anywhere from 230-302 pounds depending upon his mood and conditioning. It seemed that he fought better around 260 pounds, but usually relied upon his size and strength. He received the nickname "The Human Freight Car" from Lou Houseman, the sports editor of the newspaper Chicago Inter Ocean, because of his size.

After Fitzsimmons had lost his heavyweight title to James J. Jeffries on June 9, 1899 at the Seaside Athletic Club on Coney Island; he sort of went into semiretirement for four months. He looked at his career and wanted to see where he was going. His wife and many of his close freinds urged him to retire from the ring. But Fitz thought the matter over very carefully.

The first thing he dicided to do was to break off his relationship with his manager and brother-in-law Martin Julian. This decision was made over his divided purses over the last five years with Julian.

Fitzsimmons was almost 37 years old then when he announced that he was going to retire and that he wanted another chance with Jeffries. So he started training with a very serious attitude, and in several months later -- was ready for his "come back" crusade.

Fritz first fight in his comeback was against Geoff thorne, the heavyweight champion of South Africa, on October 28, 1899 in Chicago. Thorne was really an overgrown middleweight, who had grown into heavyweight, who should have never got into the ring with Fitz. It took

the ex-champion just on short blow to his opponents chin and down he went in the second round.

Fitz's next fight was against Jim Daly on March 27, 1900 in Philadelphia. Daly was a lighthheavy, was at the end of his career and was 33 years old. It was a bad mistake to match the two fighters as "Ruby" Robert leveled his man in the first round for a very easy knockout.

Dunkhorst was employed at the Jeffries training camp when he accepted the fight as somewhat of a joke, and encouraged him to seriously train very hard. He had been hired by Tommy Ryan to be a sparring partner, rubber, and general helper. Last fight was on March 21, he KOed Jack Hogan in 6 rounds.

He weighed 260 pounds when he started training for the fight, and after a workout his usual snack was a gallon of ice cream. Dick Walters, the camp cook, new that Dunkhorst craved very rich foods. Walters loaded his plate with the fat producers as a joke -- he began to put on weight rather than lose it. One week before the fight was to tke place, he tipped the scales at 287 pounds and he was still gaining.

Rose Fitzsimmons accompanied her husband that evening arriving with him about 9:00 p.m., and remained in his dressing room. She was very confident that her husband would win easily, and remained in there to wait his return. The bookmakers had made the ex-champion a very solid favorite at four to one.

The attendance that evening exceeded 4,000 and there were two prominent onlookers -- they were Tom Sharkey and Gus Ruhlin, both in hopes of getting a match with Fitz himself. they were confident that a win over the Cornishman might give them a shot of a title match with Jeffries.

Dunkhorst was the first to appear entering the ring followed by his seconds Tommy Ryan, Jack Jeffries, and Dan Johnson. He received a humorous reception with some scattered applause from the crowd. A great ovation and loud cheering greeted the former champion, who then entered the ring followed by his seconds: Ernest Roeber, Geoff Thorne, and the ever - faithful Dan Hickey.

Fitz was wearing a white knitted breech-clout with the American flag wrapped around his waist. He looked in peak condition, and he gave the impression that he was capable of going the distance. His opponent looked huge, but was very fleshy. Little time was lost in getting ready and in less than five minutes after entering the ring they were waiting for the bell to ring for round one.

Referee Charley White called the two fighters into the center of the ring and they shook hands. One might say that it looked like a fight between an elephant and a stork.

The bell sounded for round one and Dunkhorst came out in a crouching stance as Fitz circled around his opponent sizing him up. Then he threw a left hook that landed on his opponents right ear. Fitz stepped back to avoid a right-hand swing that missed him by a mile.

Dunkhorst landed several weak jabs to bob's face, but took hard right to his ribs followed by several stinging jabs to the head and a right on the chin. The crowd came to its feet as Dunkhorst was staggered and backed away.

As Fitz went after him; he met a very reckless and desperated fighter. He fought back as the two exchanged punches in center of the ring as the bell sounded to end round one. At the bell, Fitz landed a left to the head.

At the end of round one; Dunkhorst had regained some of his confidence back, and came out very fast and ready to mix it up. A stiff left jab to his face rocked Fitz back on his heels, Bob then took another jab, but ripped a right and left to the stomach. Then a left hook make the giant wobble and two more solid body shots made Dunkhorst grunt and double up -- and he grabbed Fitz eagerly ready to clinch.

As the referee seperated the two, Fitz sent a fast short left hook to his rivals jaw -- and down went Dunkhorst with a crash to the canvas. Referee White counted off the seconds as Ed remained motionless -- it was a full minute before his seconds could raise him to his feet. The crowd cheered wildly as Ftizsimmons walked around the ring with his hand raised in victory. The time was two minutes and twenty-five seconds of the second round.

The headlines next day in the sporting pages read: "Fitz Himself Again", "Fitz has not forgotten How", and "Lanky Bob -- shows something of his old form." But this victory wasn't enough for the fight-going public to accept him as the number one challengers for Jeffries title. But the victories over Gus Ruhlin and old-time enemy Sailor Tom Sharkey did qualify him for a second fight with the Champion.

Fitzsimmons dream of regaining his championship back was dashed against the ring ropes in San Fransisco on July 25, 1902. A right hand to the stomach followed by a tremendous left hook put the old warrior down for good. Time had caught up with Fitz and had him in his grasp, but the theatre beckoned him with open arms.

Fitz never received due credit for his dramatic ability, and the critics called him the "horseshoe tenor". He starred in a play called the "Honest Blacksmith" that toured the country. One could say that

rendered a ballad in a pleasing tenor voice and for an encore fashioned a horseshoe in full view of the audience.

And guess who played opposite him as the leading man in the villians role. It was Ed Dunkhorst!! It was said of Fitzsimmons -- he thought so much of the big fellow that he hired him for the part.

Dunkhorst was knocked out every night by Fitz by taking a blow in the solar Plexus without a murmur -- with of course tempered blows.