

"Fitzsimmon's Toughest Battle"

Bob Fitzsimmon vs. Gus Ruhlin at
Madison Square Garden on August 10, 1900

by
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After James J. Jeffries had defeated Bob Fitzsimmons on June 9, 1899 at the Seaside Athletic Club for the heavyweight championship - - - three fighters loomed as contenders; they were "Gentleman" Jim Corbett, Tom "The Sailor" Sharkey, and Gus "The Akron Giant" Ruhlin.

Bob Fitzsimmons, the former champion, then settled down to a life of semi-retirement to think about his future in boxing. He has been described as basically a good-natured, non-violent, home loving, animal-fancying individual.

He & Rose moved into the exclusive neighbor of Bensonhurst ---some of the local residents were shocked; a common pug. List were living among the best civilized people in the world.

It was his wife's gentle, gracious manner and efficient way that she ran or controlled her household---this gained the respect of the whole neighborhood. By the time, Bob, himself, was very well liked by all the neighbors. He adored his wife, showed love for his children and his home.

Rose knew that he would return to boxing again, and promised to back him up all the way. Fitz himself was by no means convinced that his days in the ring were over. Then he announced that he would began a vigorous comeback crusade. He also hired George Dawson, an excellent trainer and instructor, who was a good friend of the Fitzsimmons family.

Fitz also dissolved his partnership with his manager and brother-in-law -- Martin Julian. He claimed that Julian had swindled him out of approximately \$125,000 in purses. He would run his own campaign and business, and in October 28, 1899---the comeback started. He fought Geoff Thorne in Chicago in 2 rounds.

On May 27, 1900 at the 1st Regiment Armory in Philadelphia, Fitz knocked out Jim Daly in one round.

Jim Jeffries defended his title for the first time on Nov. 3, 1899 and won a 25 round decision over Sharkey. After defeating Jack Finnegan from Detroit by knockout in one round--he turned his attention to "Gentleman Jim" Corbett. They fought on May 11, 1900 at Coney Island Greater NYCA.

Corbett fought the fight of his life against Jeffries, and was ahead on points by a large margin. He only needed to stay two more rounds to recapture the heavyweight laurels. But Jeffries caught him with one tremendous punch and it was all over. "Gentleman Jim" thus eliminated himself as a contender.

The following month on June 26, 1900 in the same ring, Gus Ruhlin punched Sharkey into such a state of helplessness that the referee stopped the fight in the 15th round. Sharkey returned to his saloon on East 14th street in New York---his dreams of another championship fight with Jeffries shattered. Now Ruhlin was the leading contender.

Fitzsimmons continued his comeback by knocking out Jim Daly in Philadelphia in one round; on April 30, 1900, he knocked out Ed "The Human Freight Car" at Brooklyn Hercules Athletic Club in two rounds. Dunkhorst was Jeffries sparring partner, and won the fight. He had never knocked the large man down in training camp.

"Gentleman Jim" Corbett had trained Ruhlin in preparation for the Sharkey fight, and his victory was very convincing. It was Corbett, who convinced Billy Madden to try and get a bout with Fitzsimmons.

Corbett's dislike of the Cornishman hadn't diminished in time, and he wished that Ruhlin would bring Bob's "come-back" to a halt. Fitzsimmons was contacted by the Madison Square Garden matchmaker and was very enthusiastic about the match. The first available date was August 10, 1900, and both men put up \$2,500 as forfeit money.

Ruhlin was the younger man by nine years, but this didn't bother Fitz. To him it meant that he was older and consequently wiser in ringmanship. 12,000 spectators, who paid from \$3.00 to \$20.00 for their seats, filled the Garden to capacity---box office receipts were over \$33,000.

When Fitz appeared; he got a rousing welcome---the crowd was even louder for Ruhlin. The ex-champion wore pink tights, a present from his wife Rose, who thought it would show off his ruddy complexion.

In the first round, Ruhlin following the advise of Corbett--became the aggressor. The steady left hand and precision punching opened a cut of Fitz left eye and a bad gash on his upper lip. Just before the end of round, the ex-champion was floored and fell to his knees. He rose and wobbled over to his corner.

Ruhlin came out of his corner with a rush; eager to end the fight. Both fighters were exchanging punches---now Ruhlin was bleeding from his mouth, and the cut over Fitz's left eye was open. A power right to Gus's nose, and almost broke it; followed by a left to the stomach---and down went Ruhlin.

To the amazement of every spectator in the Garden; Gus got up---he let go a right that had Fitz over the right eye, and staggered the Cornishman---Fitz knew he had a battle on his hands.

Rounds 3 and 4, saw Fitz on the receiving end of every blow---several times the ex-champion was staggered. It was becoming a blood-bath as both fighters were taking plenty of punishment.

In the fifth round, the tide of battle turned in favor of Fitz. The ex-champion landed a terrific shot to the solar plexus that almost doubled Ruhlin up. It was followed by a shot over the right eye that started puffing around that area. Now Fitzsimon was in control, and he never let up on his opponent. It seemed now that it was just a matter of time as Ruhlin was fading.

When they answered the bell for the sixth round, Bob rushed his man and with a series of short left--set up his opponent. Ruhlin was staggered; as a left to the body made him wince. Gus dropped his hands---a left to the jaw and down when the "Akron Giant". The referee Charlie White counted him out.

Several minutes elapsed before Gus regained consciousness, bleeding and in terrific pain--was carried to his dressing room, a defeated, but not disgraced fighter. Fitzsimmons face was as almost as badly cut-up as was Ruhlin's and the eyes of each were highly puffed.

After Fitz had retired and gone into vaudeville; he was always asked what was his toughest match. Whether it was Corbett or Jeffries. Then Bob would say; "Gus Ruhlin was the toughest of 'em all"---"I had a harder time winning that bout with Gus in the Garden in New York on August 10, 1900, than I had in any other bout of my career. I knocked 'im out in the sixth". Thus the master spoke!!