

Sheriff Foster: The King with the Killer Punch **By Mike Casey on November 23, 2015**



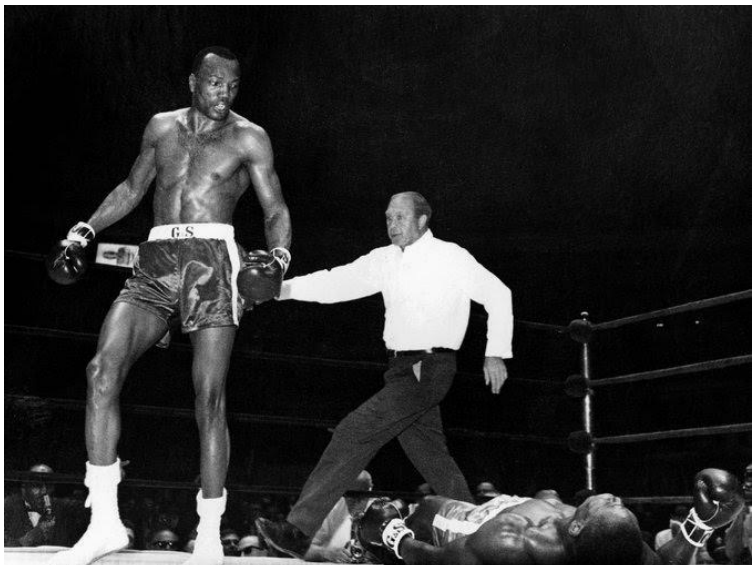
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He was the deputy sheriff of the Albuquerque Police Department in New Mexico but the undisputed sheriff of the world during his explosive reign as light heavyweight champion between 1968 and 1974. Bob Foster, who passed away on November 21 at the age of 77, was one of the greatest of all the 175-pound champions, making a record 14 successful defenses of his crown in an era when such statistics were far more meaningful and carried far greater substance.

A tall and intimidating figure, Foster was a smart boxer and a terrific puncher. Like his great predecessor, Bob Fitzsimmons, Foster's extruded physique and tremendous power made him a freak and almost a misfit of his own weight division. Many of his challengers couldn't even get past his reach and were bombed into submission by Bob's awesome left hook and slashing right crosses.

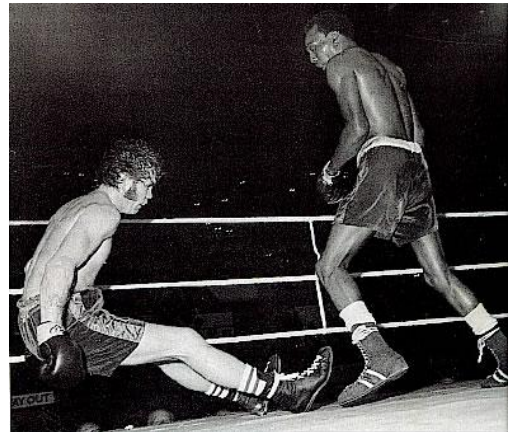
The left hook with which Foster deprived Dick Tiger of the championship in the fourth round in



1968 was one of the greatest I have ever seen. It was a devastating, lightning strike out of nowhere that sat Dick down like an obedient dog and toppled him back for the full count. Watch that punch on the film and it is almost too fast to follow. Never before had the great Tiger been knocked out for the count in his illustrious career and only once before had he been decked, briefly so by Emile Griffith.

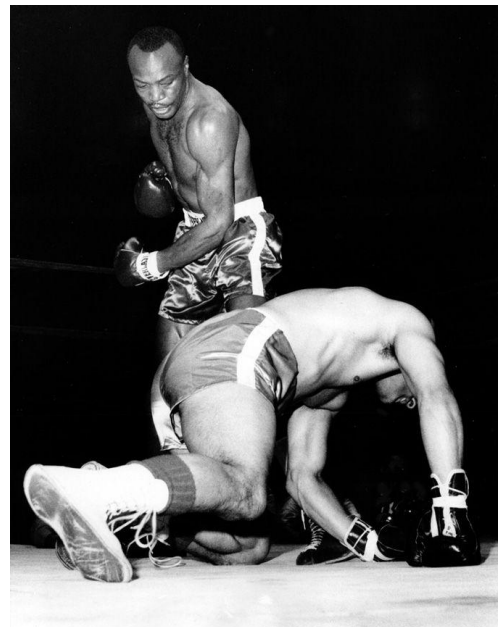
An equally thunderous and perfectly timed left hook sent Mike Quarry into dreamland, also in the fourth round, at Las Vegas in 1972. So distressed was older brother Jerry Quarry at seeing the effect of that blow that he was already a beaten man when he faced Muhammad Ali a short time later in the evening's main event.

Three months after the chilling knockout of Mike Quarry, Foster traveled to London to defend his title against southpaw Chris Finnegan at the Empire Pool, Wembley. I saw that great fight and will never forget it. The spirited Finnegan held no fear of big Bob and actually seemed to be taking control of the fight around the midway point. But the deadly Foster could lower the boom at any time and knocked out Finnegan with one sudden left hook in the fourteenth round.



Earlier in his reign, in January 1969, Bob blitzed New Jersey slugger Frank DePaula in one round at Madison Square Garden. The colorful DePaula, who would be shot to death a year later, had secured his chance in the 1968 fight of the year against former champion, Dick Tiger. Dick won a unanimous decision in a memorable brawl that saw DePaula score two second round knockdowns before being decked himself twice in the third.

The rangy Foster had no intention of getting himself into that kind of slugfest, but suddenly he found himself on the floor in the opening round from a DePaula left that looked more like a shove. Foster's calmness was impressive as Frank's fans cheered wildly. Bob took the mandatory eight-count and then set about coolly chopping DePaula down. A hard right followed by a vicious left hook produced a delayed knockdown where Frank seemed to freeze on his feet before dropping to the canvas. He gamely arose but was soon knocked over again by a whistling right.



This time DePaula wobbled badly when he made it to his feet and Foster wasted no more time. A left jab and then a short, cracking right to the jaw sent Frank down for a third time and prompted referee Johnny LoBianco to stop the fight at the 2:17 mark.

After sampling Foster's power, DePaula said: "I wasn't hurt. My feet went from under me. I don't like that three-knockdown rule. I took better punches than that from Tiger and didn't go down."

A man often says things like that after getting knocked around by a puncher like Bob Foster.

Like ducks in a shooting gallery, Foster's line of challengers kept getting shot down. Roger Rouse, Mark Tessman, Hal (TNT) Carroll, Tommy Hicks, Brian Kelly and Vicente Rondon were all ruthlessly dispatched inside schedule. Ohio's Ray Anderson survived the full 15 rounds with Bob but only after doing a good impression of a roadrunner.

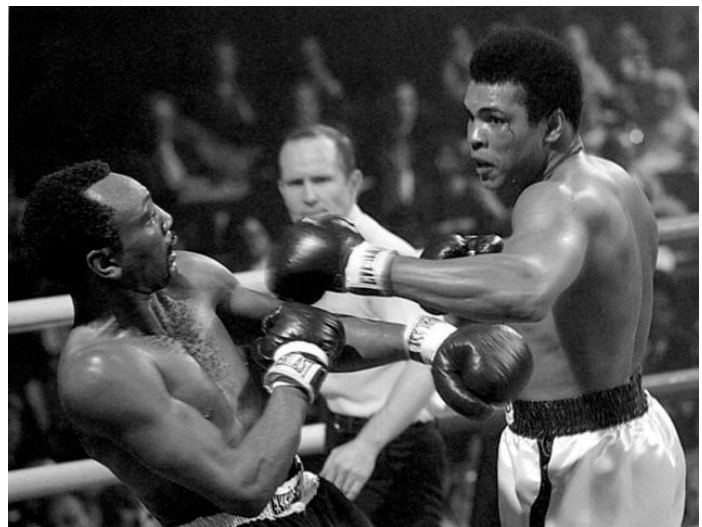
Late in Bob's reign, hardy South African Pierre Fourie twice took Foster the 15 rounds, but the only real blemish on Foster's great reign came in his final defense when he was awarded a hotly disputed draw with Argentina's tough Jorge Ahumada in Foster's hometown of Albuquerque. But Bob was pretty much at the end of the trail by then and should have adhered to his decision to retire.

He came back to win five fights in a row, but lost his last two to Mustafa Wasajja and Bob Hazelton.

Transition

Unlike Bob Fitzsimmons, Foster could never make a successful transition to the heavyweights. When he was young and inexperienced, he was bested by Doug Jones, Ernie Terrell and Zora Folley.

When Bob reached his prime, his only realistic targets at the higher weight were two titans in Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali. Both men swept Foster aside, but that was no disgrace. Michael Spinks won the heavyweight championship from the aging and fading Larry Holmes and even then disputably so. Foster, by contrast, was crushed in two rounds by a Frazier at the peak of his powers in 1970 and overwhelmed by a still very formidable Ali in 1972. But Bob never gave up against Muhammad, trying again and again to blow him down with those monster shots that shattered the light heavyweights of the day.



Even as a raw youngster, Bob Foster's talent and tenacity were clearly apparent. Young fighters learned the hard way in his era. He was mixing with the best virtually right from the start of his career and never got disheartened by the clobberings he took from bigger and wiser opponents. Bob showed immense courage in only his tenth fight against the seasoned Doug Jones. Down and almost out in the first round, Foster bravely rallied in the following rounds and brought the crowd to its feet as he cut loose with hard punches to have Jones in trouble. Having had only three days to train for the fight, Bob eventually succumbed to Doug's pressure in the eighth round, but the skinny youngster had marked his territory as one to watch for the future.

Bob never could stop picking on the heavyweights, but gradually he found his natural domain and began to shoot for the light heavyweight championship. It was a sensible

decision. Only one man ever got the better of him at that weight and that was the great Peruvian, Mauro Mina, who unanimously outpointed the younger Foster in Lima in 1963. What a shame that Mina had to retire in 1965 because of eye troubles. A championship match between Bob and Mauro would have been a contest to savor.

Foster made a big statement of intent in December 1964 when he stopped the eternally tough Henry Hank in nine rounds at Norfolk, Virginia. Bob gave all the credit for that victory to one of the great cuties of the game, middleweight Holly Mims. "With Holly telling me what to do, I knew I'd take Hank out," Foster said. "I've been working out with Holly and he kept coming in at me the same way Hank does. Holly said if I could get to him with a left, I could get to Hank. I hit Holly with the left, I hit Hank too."

Mims was pleased to have contributed and said: "Bobby did it perfectly. Hank and I split a couple of decisions in 1959 and I had a good idea of how to lick him. I told Bobby how Henry likes to bore in with his left shoulder, hands down low, and how that makes him open on his right side for a left hook. That's all Bobby needed, a little know-how."

Foster beat Hank again in 1965, but it was in 1967 that Bob began a sustained and serious run to the light heavyweight championship. A second round knockout of Andres Selpa, who had compiled an astonishing 135-47-29 record, was followed by a crushing third round triumph over long-time contender Eddie Cotton.



Big Bob was out to bag himself a Tiger and did so on May 24, 1968, with that spectacular one-punch finish at Madison Square Garden.

Absolute

Bob's belief in himself was always absolute and he wasn't shy about appearing arrogant and big-headed. Asked if he would have beaten Michael Spinks, Foster had no doubts. "There was too much amateur in him," was his explanation.

Foster could often be scathing in his choice of words when provoked. After bombing out Vicente Rondon in two rounds, the champion vented his spleen on both Rondon and the WBA.

It was undoubtedly the sweetest victory of Bob's career. The WBA had stripped him of his championship in late 1970, shortly after his knockout loss to Joe Frazier for the heavyweight title. Rondon knocked out Jimmy Dupree in six rounds for the WBA belt in February 1971 and then saw off the challenges of Piero Del Papa, Eddie Jones, Gomeo Brennan and Doyle Baird before a unification showdown with Foster at the Convention Center in Miami Beach in April 1972.

'Showdown,' if we're being candid, was a poor choice of word. Rondon froze completely and was smashed to the canvas twice before being stopped in the second round. Was Bob pleased to end it quickly? Not on your life. "Two rounds wasn't enough," he barked. "I wanted to punish Rondon for 15 rounds to beat the dumbest, scariest boxer I've

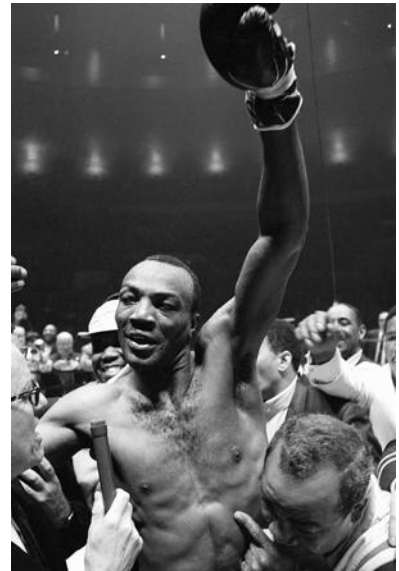
ever seen until his eyes were swollen shut. Rondon pressed me and any light heavy who presses Bob Foster should get an immediate mental examination.”

Rondon weighed in for the short-lived affair two pounds over the limit at 177, but the Miami Beach Commission decided to call it 175 after Rondon’s manager Felix Zabala claimed that the scales were misbehaving. It transpired that Rondon had needed time in a steam bath just to get to 177 after originally weighing 183.

These shenanigans didn’t put Foster in a charitable mood. “The WBA let a heavyweight fight for the light heavy title,” Bob said. “Now ain’t that sportsmanlike?”

It wasn’t a good thing to upset Robert Lloyd Foster. He could hit you very, very hard.

Life has finally shot the sheriff, but I don’t doubt that he will rest in peace and be fondly remembered.



Mike Casey is a Boxing.com writer and Founder & Editor of ALL TIME BOXING at <https://sites.google.com/site/alltimeboxingrankings>. He is a freelance journalist and boxing historian and a member of the International Boxing Research Organization (IBRO).