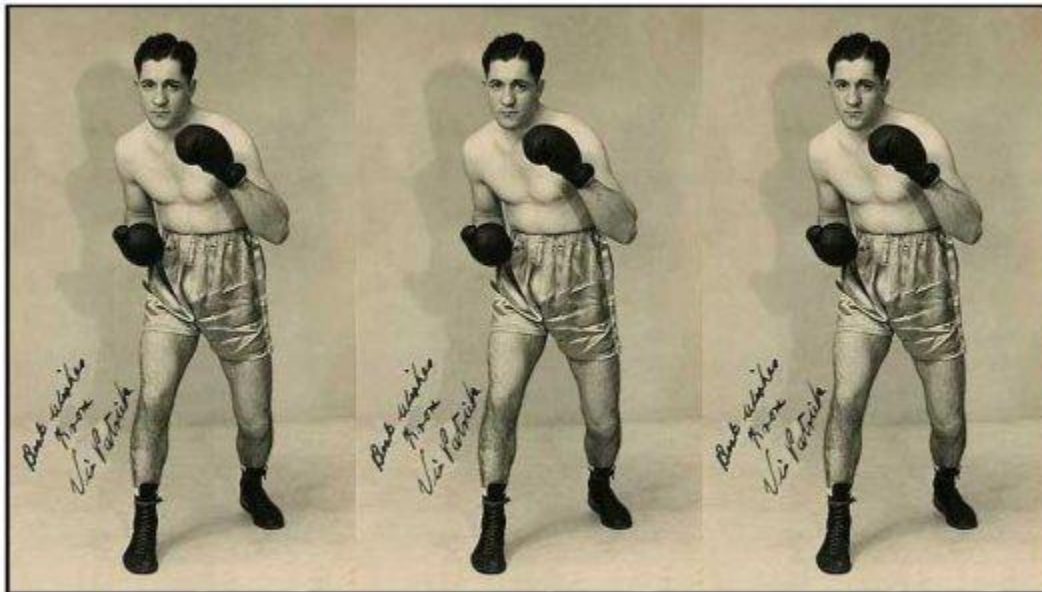


Vic Patrick — Australian Idol

By Daniel Attias



“They don’t cheer me; they don’t leave the stadium; they cheer Vic Patrick like he won.”

Patrick captured the imagination of Australian fight fans more than any other fighter had since Les Darcy some 30 years earlier...

Victor Patrick Lucca, or Vic Patrick as he was known to fight fans, was the idol of Australian boxing in the late 1940s. A big punching southpaw in the lightweight division he captured the imagination of Australian fight fans more than any other fighter had since Les Darcy took the nation by storm some 30 years earlier.

Unlike Darcy, who was ostracized for not joining the army during the First World War, Patrick stayed in Australia during World War Two and became a member of the Army, giving up his prime years and bigger opportunities in the United States, to ‘play his part’ in the war effort. He is often credited with keeping the sport of boxing alive during those war years in Australia.

Although he never saw combat, such a move endeared him to the people. Australians were in dire need of a confidence boost regarding their own identity after the Great Depression and the Second World War and many a man’s faith was placed into our pugilistic best, with Vic Patrick sitting atop the list of popular fighters of the time. According to the general public, ‘it was just a matter of time’ before Patrick got his chance at the world’s best, and they had little doubt he would go on to become lightweight champion of the world.

Patrick had an astonishing record of 50 victories and only three losses when he took on visiting American lightweight Freddie Dawson on September 1st of 1947. Dawson was considered the best fighter Patrick had faced since he battled former junior lightweight world champion Tod Morgan in a series of bouts in 1941 and ‘42.

Dawson, unlike Morgan, was thought to be reaching his peak in 1947 and his record was even more imposing than that of Patrick's. It wasn't the 50 wins, five losses and three draws that made it so but the level of opposition he had faced. A draw — which many felt Dawson had won — against the legendary Ike Williams a little over a year earlier was testament to that.

Both men were confident going into the fight. Dawson's manager, Harry Randolph called his fighter "the best lightweight in the world" in the lead up to the bout whilst Dawson wasn't exactly full of praise for his opponent, calling him a "very slow mover," among other things.

Patrick's pre-fight comments were a little more cautious, though no less confident. He spoke with The Sydney Morning Herald two days before the fight.

"I'm fitter than ever, punching harder than at any other stage of my career, and hope to beat Dawson. I am looking forward to meeting him, as he is rated as the best lightweight I've met. A win over him will advance my position in world ranking — and I am out to win."

The Australian public clamored to see the fight, tickets were sold out and crowds lined the streets outside the stadium at Rushcutters Bay in Sydney hoping to get even a snippet of news of the fight that was happening inside.

On fight night Patrick entered the ring dressed in a pale blue gown and was greeted with a deafening roar; the crowd firmly behind their hero, whilst Dawson entered with a white towel over his head, dressed in a brilliant red gown piped with gold.

The unorthodox, crab-like stance of Patrick was in full view as the fight began and he threw out his right jab in a pawing motion. The young Chicago native showed off his speed right from the get-go and peppered the face of Patrick with stinging jabs and solid right crosses and opened a small cut beside the right eye of Patrick.

Dawson showed off his superior footwork in the second round and the fight followed the familiar pattern of a boxer versus a puncher, the quicker more skilled man darting in and out landing combinations and avoiding most of the return fire. A thunderous straight right by Dawson landed late in the round and staggered Patrick and the crowd undoubtedly began to wonder if their boy was up to the task, but Patrick held on and made the bell.

The third and fourth rounds went along the same lines, Dawson outboxing the big punching Patrick without worry, but in the fifth Vic started to come on strong. He began beating Dawson to the punch and was landing lead right hand jabs and following them up with thudding left hooks.



Dawson continued on the back foot throughout rounds six and seven, a tactic that took a bit of sting off the blows being hurled at him from Patrick, who had well and truly found his rhythm by this stage.

The crowd began to sense that Patrick might very well be up to the task in the eighth round when he landed some solid shots that had Dawson in trouble but the Chicagoan clinched often to avoid further punishment. Many years after the event, Dawson would admit he had “no recollection” of that eighth round.

The break between rounds was enough for Dawson to regain his senses and he once again showed his sublime boxing skills and despite what many fans believed to be a case of showboating, he had done something which helped his cause greatly. He stopped mid-round, dropped his hands to his side and stuck out his chin inviting Patrick to hit him. The suddenness of it all spooked Vic who felt it was a trap and backed off giving Dawson a much-needed reprieve from the attack.

The tenth round was a fairly even affair; both men had their moments and the pace of the battle slowed but Patrick came out in the eleventh and went on the attack; he landed a colossal straight left hand, which sent Dawson flying through the ropes and onto the ring apron. The crowd went wild; many thinking that the visiting American would struggle to get up from such a blow but Dawson did in fact rise and was smart enough to clinch his way to the bell.



The final round began with both men looking weary; but it was Dawson who would take advantage of the situation and he unloaded a barrage of punches on Patrick who was up against the ropes. Patrick was dropped by a big right hand and was down for the count of eight. He climbed off the canvas but was clearly in no state to fight. Referee Joe Wallis waved Dawson on despite his obvious reluctance to finish Patrick, who he felt was already done. Dawson landed two more punches and Patrick was out cold.



For three and half minutes the crowd stood in silence waiting for their fallen hero to regain consciousness and when he finally did and waved to the crowd to signify he was okay, they cheered as loudly as had he won.

Dawson had come away the victor in a fight for the ages but there was no way he would be able to win over a crowd so in love with Vic Patrick.

Dawson was bemused by the reaction, remarking to one of his seconds, Bill McConnell, “what gives with that crowd out there? They don’t cheer me; they don’t leave the stadium; they cheer Patrick like he won.”

Freddie Dawson would go on to become a very popular fighter on Australian soil and a big fan favorite but this particular night the fans cared for just one man, win or lose, their idol, Vic Patrick.