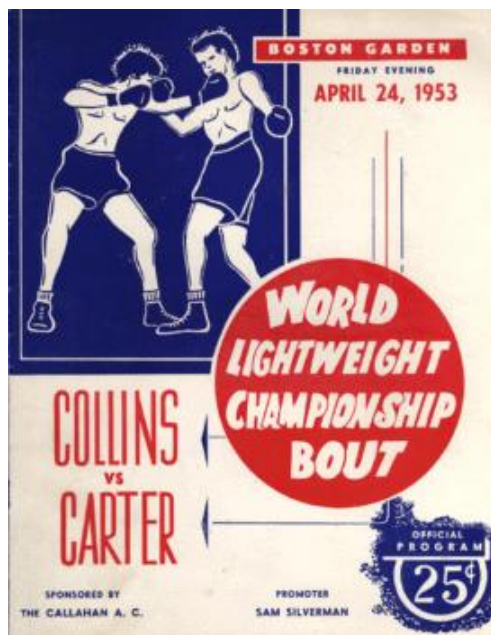


The Boston Massacre: Jimmy Carter VS Tommy Collins

By Bobby Franklin

It was April 24, 1953 when Tommy Collins stepped into the ring at the Boston Garden to challenge Lightweight Champion Jimmy Carter for the title. Collins had become a favorite of fans who were taken with his exciting style and hard punching. At the time of the Carter fight Collins had scored knock outs in 40 of his 58 victories. He had also lost 9 bouts with 7 of those losses coming via stoppage. His biggest win was a kayo of former Featherweight Champion Willie Pep, though many questioned whether that fight was on the level.

Collins was coming off of a 6 fight winning streak going into the fight while Jimmy Carter had dropped his last 2 contests, both non title fights. Carter's record stood at 87 fights, 64 wins (20 by stoppage), 15 losses (1 by stoppage), and 8 draws. While Collins, on paper, appeared to be the superior puncher, Carter had fought and beaten much stiffer competition. The champion was also an extremely skillful boxer who threw his punches with great accuracy, something Collins would experience first hand. The odds were set at 2 to 1 in the champions favor, but it was not long after the opening bell that 100 to 1 would have made more sense. The referee for the bout was Tommy Rawson, a former amateur boxing star who was reported to have had 220 simon-pure fights before turning pro.



The fight was a huge event in Boston, drawing approximately 12,000 fans and setting a record gate for the time with gross receipts adding up to \$152,155.00. It was also broadcast live on national television.

As the fighters entered the ring a Marine Corps color guard stood at attention for the playing of the National Anthem. The Garden crowd was filled with excitement at the anticipation of their local hero winning the title. That excitement would dissipate quickly and turn to concern the local boy would be seriously injured or even killed.

As the fight began it didn't take long to see it was a serious mismatch. Carter immediately showed he was the superior fighter taking control of the bout before the sound of the opening bell had faded. He boxed rings around Collins for the first two rounds.

As bad as this was, it would turn much worse for Collins.

There is little doubt the bout should have been stopped after the third time Tommy hit the canvas.



At the bell for the third round Carter came out and landed a solid left hook to the chin of Collins. Seconds later he landed with a tremendous right hand that dropped Collins flat on his back. Tommy appeared to be out before he hit the canvas, but by some miracle, or perhaps curse, he made it back to his feet at the count of nine. Referee Tommy Rawson very quickly wiped off Collins' gloves and immediately sent him back into action. Carter dropped Collins again with a left/right combination. Again, Collins looked to be out but got back to his feet at the count of eight. And again, referee Rawson didn't take any time to examine

Collins and had him resume fighting. Carter would go on to deck Collins for a total of seven times in that third round. Collins was attempting to fight back but what little resistance he showed was displayed with wild swings. Six of the seven knockdowns were brutal. It can be argued the fight should have been stopped after the first one. There is little doubt the bout should have been stopped after the third time Tommy hit the canvas.

At the end of the third round, Collins with his left eye swollen shut couldn't find his corner and had to be helped there by his seconds. Referee Rawson did not examine Collins between rounds. His seconds never should of allowed him to come out for the fourth round, but they did. Carter dropped Collins again shortly after the start of the round and again Referee Rawson allowed the bout to continue. Collins went down again, and as Rawson was counting over him his handlers jumped into the ring and called a halt to the fight. If Collins had managed to regain his feet it is apparent Rawson would have let the carnage continue. I wouldn't have been surprised if Rawson picked Collins up off the canvas and pushed him back towards Carter.



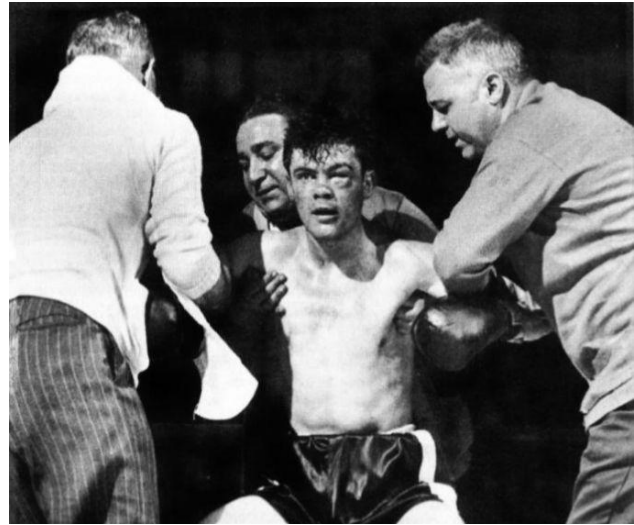
Shortly after the fight, switchboards at TV stations across the country lit up with calls from the public who had witnessed this disgraceful officiating by the referee. The callers were expressing outrage at the brutality they witnessed and the fact it was allowed to go on for so long.

"I asked Rawson, what do you want to do, get him killed?"

After the third round, Carters' trainer Willie Ketchum pleaded with Rawson to stop the fight. He said "I asked Rawson, what do you want to do, get him killed?" Rawson replied "I know what I'm doing." Fans at ringside were yelling for the fight to be stopped. The Boston Globe reported a priest in attendance had started praying for Collins' life. Even by the standards of 1953 when fights were allowed to go on longer before being stopped, this was a travesty. Rawson never hesitated to send Collins right back into the

fray, and never even gave him a close look after the knockdowns. It was a sickening exhibition of officiating. It was also a disgrace the ringside doctor didn't intervene or for that matter did anyone from the Boxing Commission.

After the bout, commissioners from around the country weighed in with criticism of how Rawson handled the fight. George Barton President of the National Boxing Association said "It was the worst exhibition of boxing officiating I have seen in fifty years. I can't understand why the referee allowed Collins to take such a beating. The fight was so hopelessly one sided that I think it should have been stopped after Collins had been knocked down for the third time in the third round." Harold Kaese wrote in the Boston Globe "It was pitiful to see...where does the contest leave off and humanity step in?"



Former Welterweight Champion Barney Ross was quoted as saying "I have never seen such a brutal affair in a ring in all my life."

Referee Tommy Rawson stood by his actions in the ring that night stating that "Since it was a championship fight, I regarded it as my duty to see it ended in a decisive fashion." If it had ended any more decisively poor Tommy Collins would have been dead.

This bout and Rawson's actions during it were a stain on boxing. it did lead to some changes being made to the rules. These changes included implementation of the three knock down rule and the mandatory eight count. Amazingly, Rawson was not officially censured for his bizarre and disgraceful behavior. In fact, he was allowed to continue working as a referee which he did for many years.



Rawson (far left) examines photos of the Carter-Collins fight at a hearing held by the Massachusetts Boxing Commission. The commission members are Henry Lamar (center), Otis M. Whitney, and Tommy McFarkand (standing). Rawson was exonerated.

Boxing by its very nature is a dangerous sport where the possibility of severe injury and death are always present. That's why it is so important for officials

to do their utmost to watch out for the welfare of the participants. Watching the Collins/Carter fight and the disgraceful manner in which Tommy Rawson behaved is a text book example of what not to do.

It appears Tommy Collins was lucky a priest was at ringside praying for him. God heard his plea.

******This article originally ran on Boxing over Broadway on April 28, 2018******