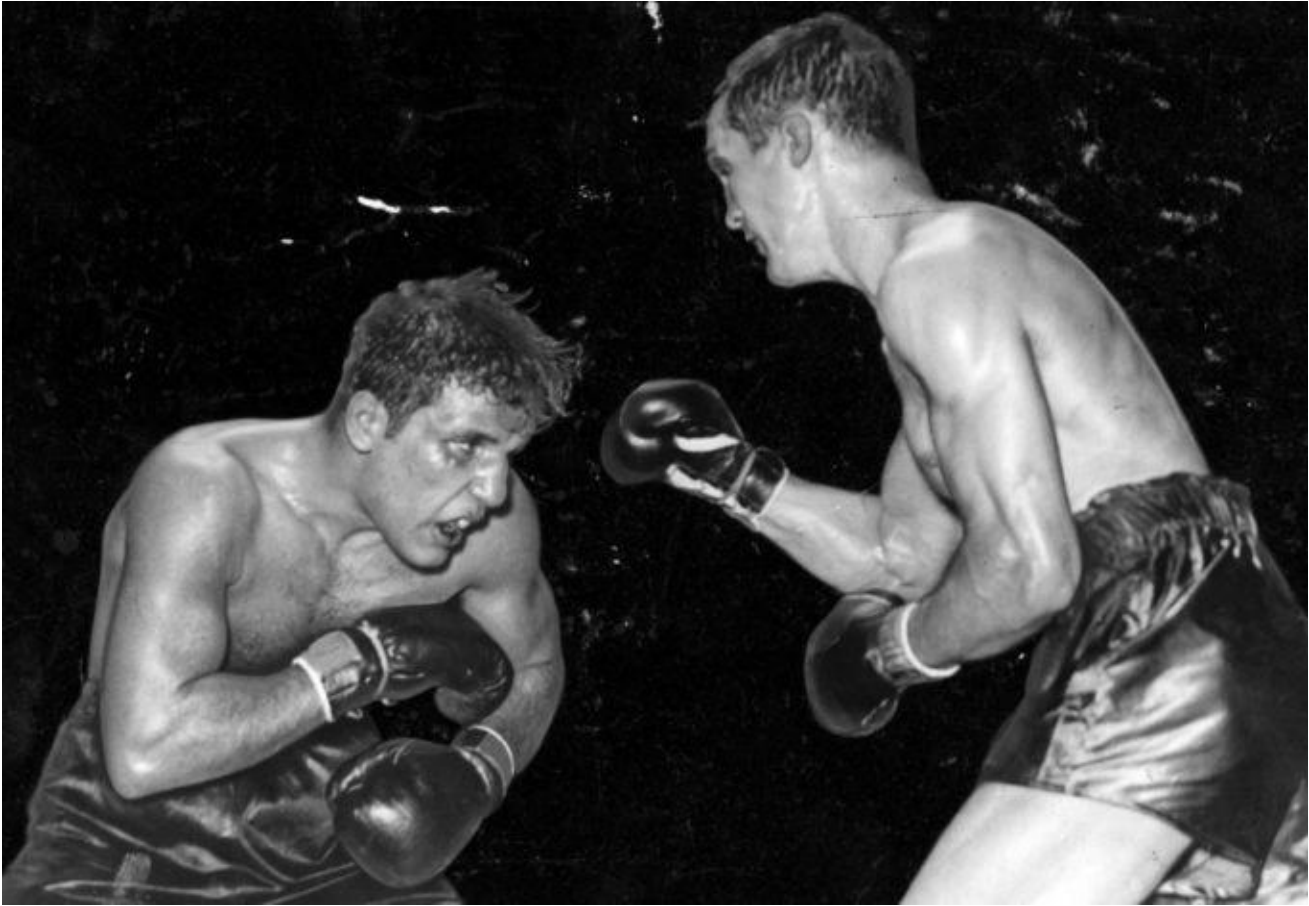

Trouble in Forbes Field

By

Buddy Gibbs

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LaMotta and Zivic had a four-fight series with controversial verdicts all around

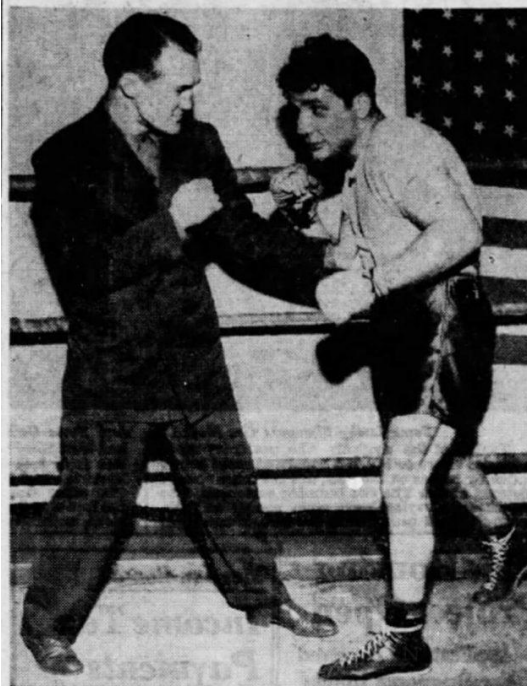
Some fights are simply impossible to make for one reason or another, but the fights between Pittsburgh's Fritzie Zivic and New York's Jake LaMotta were inescapable. Jake LaMotta was training for his fight against Pittsburgh native Ossie Harris when Zivic sat and watched LaMotta spar at Monk Ketchell's gym. Zivic praised LaMotta after Jake's workout but picked Harris to beat him. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette had Zivic and LaMotta faceoff in the ring for a picture after LaMotta's workout, which would foreshadow their fights to come. However, LaMotta still had to get past Ossie Harris before he could take on Zivic. LaMotta would do just that on March 30, 1943, in Duquesne Gardens in Pittsburgh, when he beat Harris by unanimous decision. Art Rooney and Jack McGinley had promoted the Harris-LaMotta fight and knew that a bout between the cerebral Zivic and the one-man riot Jake LaMotta would be a crowd thriller.

Zivic and LaMotta were as opposite of each other as humanly possible. LaMotta had a mean streak in him to match the bull moniker attached to him, while Zivic was more coolheaded and easy going. Even the fighting styles of the two differed dramatically. Zivic was a crafty sharpshooter who remained levelheaded under fire—even in the trenches, when hurt or when he or his opponent decided to get dirty in their tactics. LaMotta was chaos in the form of a man. Where Zivic liked to use his head (figuratively and literally) in his battles, LaMotta liked to use his strength, physical attributes, and a tireless attack to overwhelm his opponents. Zivic would pick you apart and slice you up, whereas LaMotta liked to smother you and beat you down. Even their fighting careers were polar opposites going into their first meeting. Zivic was 10 years the elder of "Joltin' Jake", who was only 20-years-old. Zivic had been fighting for

nearly 12 years as a pro, whereas LaMotta had been fighting in the paid ranks for 2. Zivic made good use of his time as a pro and was a veteran of 170 fights, while LaMotta had a mere 42 fights under his belt.

Although LaMotta had a small number of fights in comparison to his veteran rival, he had some quality names on his resume. Jake had faced Nate Bolden, Jose Basora, Vic Dellicurti, Jackie Wilson and Jimmy Edgar. After Jake's first fight with Edgar, legendary broadcaster Don Dunphy said "It was one of four of the best fights I've ever broadcast." LaMotta had seen some serious action in his short career. However, a mutual opponent of Zivic and LaMotta, Sugar Ray Robinson, was what the press had focused on when sizing up Fritzie and Jake. LaMotta at the time was a feared fighter but Robinson wasn't one to worry about an opponent's reputation and had faced the Bronx battler 3 times, winning 2 of those meetings by decision and losing 1 of them by decision. That loss to Jake was the first loss of Robinson's career and would be the only loss he would sustain in his prime. They would fight three more times and Ray would win the other 3 fights. Before Fritzie and Jake faced off, Zivic had met Robinson on two occasions. Zivic would lose the first by a 10-round unanimous decision and the 2nd fight by TKO in the 10th round of a 12-round fight. However, Robinson would go to his grave saying Zivic was his toughest fight(s).

Fritzie Meets LaMotta



—Post-Gazette Photo
Some day they may meet in the same ring, but yesterday Fritzie Zivic just looked on while Joltin' Jacob LaMotta worked out at Monk Ketchell's gymnasium. The two later posed for the above picture after the drill. Fritzie was impressed by LaMotta's speed and condition, but gave Ossie Harris a good chance to beat him.

Under the Rooney-McGinley promotion, the Zivic-LaMotta bout was set for May 24, 1943, at Forbes Field in Pittsburgh. It was agreed that after their fight the gloves they used would be auctioned off to the Salvation Army for charity. Unfortunately, the fight would be delayed two times for a two-week postponement due to bad weather, causing them to miss the auction. When the fight was originally scheduled the odds were as high as 11 to 5 in favor of LaMotta, mostly because of his youth and size. When Zivic heard these odds he gave a quick response with his usual smile, "Say, who put me on the short end of the odds against LaMotta? He's a busy slugger but I'll box him. Sure he is the only one that beat Sugar Ray Robinson. But that ain't gonna mean nothing Monday."

Zivic needed not to worry much about the odds because as soon as their weights of 155 1/2 (LaMotta) and 151 1/2 (Zivic) were mentioned on the original date of the fight they dropped as low as 7 to 5 in favor of LaMotta. The odds still weren't where Zivic would have them but at least they were giving old man Zivic some kind of chance before LaMotta sent him into retirement. The final date was set for June 10, 1943. The delays in the fight didn't seem to hurt the turnout, with fans coming as far as New York City and Buffalo, and many others from all over the county, including 2,500 soldiers. Jake's father, Joseph LaMotta, who had been discharged from the army a couple of weeks prior, was in attendance to see Jake in action. Also in the crowd was Sergeant Barney Ross, who was to be introduced before the main event came on. Commissioners Leon Rain and George Jones were going to be sitting ringside as well, with a long list of out-of-town reporters.

The gates would open at 5 p.m., with the main event starting at 10 p.m. and with the general admission ticket prices set at \$1.25. Although those betting had LaMotta with a slight advantage, there was said to be many of those experts in the crowd of 11,987 that thought the crafty Croat would be too experienced for the Bronx Bull. From the opening round, Zivic shot out stinging left jabs and followed those up with hooks and bolo punches under Jake's heart. In the second round, Zivic with his sharpshooting blows, managed to cut Jake's left eye and made a habit of crashing his punches into the wound. According to Al Abrams from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Zivic kept the Bronx Bull off balance all night with his left-handed attack and had Jake's right eye in bad shape in the 7th round. Abrams noted that the odd

change in LaMotta's style may have been from his low weight of 155 1/2 lbs. and when he did use his usual style of attack he did better. But Abram's believed it was Zivic's left hand and craftiness that kept his larger and younger opponent off his game. When LaMotta managed to get Zivic on the ropes or in the corner he had some success but Zivic didn't stay there long and would spin himself out of danger. Zivic seemed to always have an answer for the bull rushes of Joltin' Jake.

After the scheduled 10 rounds were up, Joe Tucker announced Jake LaMotta was the winner of a split decision.

A controversial decision that didn't sit well with the fans and most of the sports writers in attendance who thought the local boy put on a boxing lesson. Referee Al Grayber scored it 6-4 in favor of LaMotta and judge Kid Stinger had it 6-2-2 for LaMotta, while judge George Martzo had it 6-3-1 in favor of Zivic. To give an idea of what people ringside thought of the decision a poll was conducted. Barney Ross, who left in the 9th round, said before he left that "Zivic will win easy." Al Abrams from the Post-Gazette gave LaMotta only 3 rounds, while Harry Keck from the Sun Telegraph reported, "I gave LaMotta only the first and 10th rounds. It looked like Fritzie by a mile to me." Even Joe Tucker, who announced the winner, declared, "In all my years of picking up the slips, I never was so surprised as I was when I read the results of that one. I just couldn't believe they were true." Even LaMotta was not sure he won saying, "I thought it was close, but didn't know who would win."



WALTZ-ME-AROUND-AGAIN-NELLIE! Jake LaMotta (left) and Fritz Zivic (right) are displaying the newest boxing two-step in the above scene of their 15-round bout which was staged at Forbes Field last night. Fritzie affectionately has his left arm around LaMotta's neck, while Jake is playfully putting the old squeeze play on Zivic's head. The local favorite, Zivic, received the 12-round split decision over his New York opponent. * * * Pittsburgh Press July 13, 1943

Zivic after the fight said he was gonna file to have the decision overturned but then changed his mind. In typical Zivic fashion he said, "It's just one of those things" and "it probably happened for the best." Instead of filing for a change in the decision, Zivic met with commissioners George Jones Jr. and Lou Shiring asking for a rematch. Zivic told them, "I licked the guy easy, even if the officials couldn't see it like everyone else. I want to fight him again as soon as possible and I'll lick him a second time. This time though, I want to meet him in a 20-rounder. Jake was going around town before the fight telling everyone he wants to fight 20 rounds. Well, old man Zivic will fight him 20 rounds, and I'll bet you I won't be the first to drop over from being tired. This old guy is getting stronger with age." After they explained to Zivic that it was against the law to schedule a 20-round bout in Pennsylvania, Fritzie replied, "Make it 15, 12 or 10 then. I can lick him no matter the distance. Just bring him on, that's all."



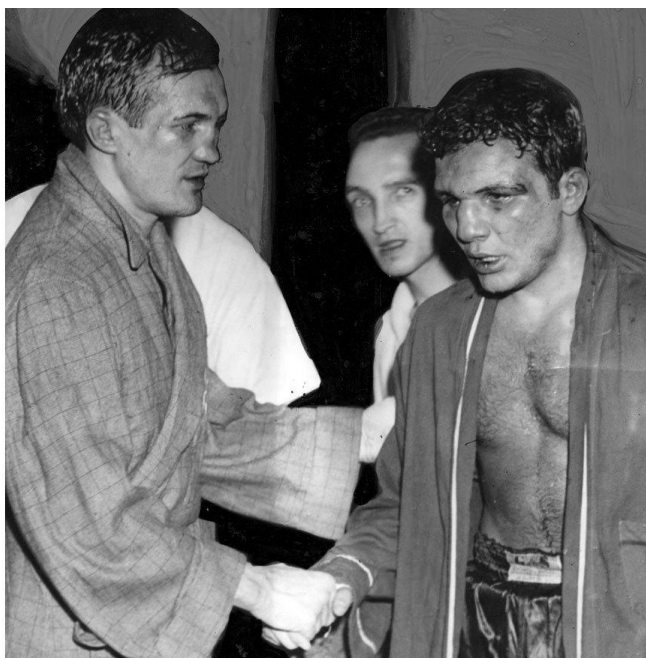
Fritzie Tells Solons He Wants Rematch
 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette June 12, 1943
 GEORGE JONES, JR. FRITZIE ZIVIC LOU SHIRING
 Instead of filing a protest as he said he would, Fritzie Zivic was all over his mad-on yesterday on his losing a decision to Joltin' Jake LaMotta on Thursday night. He met with Commissioner George Jones of Scranton (left) and Acting Com- missioner Lou Shiring (right) yesterday afternoon and told them all he wanted was an immediate rematch with LaMotta to prove he can lick the New Yorker "again," this time to get the official verdict.

Not only did fans boo the decision for 20 minutes, but immediately after the fight rumors were that of it being fixed. Promoters Rooney and McGinley, along with judge Stinger and referee Grayber, were catching the brunt of the blame. One man wrote to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette after the fight that although he didn't see the bout and was not a boxing fan, he was on a street car the night of the fight

with fans who had left Forbes Field in utter disgust of the decision, all of whom were declaring a fix. They believed the judges and gamblers were tied together and that something needed to be done. Havey Boyle, who wrote for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, came to the defense of promoters Rooney and McGinley. Harvey pointed out that the promoters have no say in who the judges or referee is and that the commissioners control such things. Not to mention the good reputation of the Pittsburgh promoters as well as the judge and referee in question. He also pointed out that just because it's a bad decision doesn't mean it's a crooked one.

The rumors seemed to be nothing more than emotions running wild after a bad call in a fight that needed a rematch. Shortly after the controversial bout, Matty Bain had been appointed as one of the three men who was going to act as commissioner of boxing throughout Pennsylvania. While laughing, Bain made the comment that he was pretty lucky that the Zivic – LaMotta decision came before and not after he had received his appointment and hoped that his efforts would guard against any similar cases of dissatisfaction. Zivic and LaMotta were signed right away for a rematch. A rematch that was supposed to clear things up but didn't.

The return bout on July 12, 1943, also took place in Forbes Field. This time it was under the watchful eye of Matty Bain, the newly appointed commissioner and it was set for 15 rounds. During the noon weigh-in, Zivic was not his normal calm relaxed self. He was tense and crabby, as his trainer Bobby Quinn described him. LaMotta showed no signs of emotion with an assumed attitude that he was focused on the obstacle he was about to face. The other key difference between the first fight and the rematch was the fighter's weights. Zivic weighed in at 151 lbs., while LaMotta tipped the scales at 157 1/2 lbs., two pounds more than he had previously. Mike Capriano, LaMotta's manager, claimed Jake had trained down too fine in the first meeting which caused LaMotta to change his style—a mistake he wouldn't make twice. LaMotta seemed to agree, as he sipped on broth after the weigh-in and planned a big meal of steak, green beans and more to keep himself from being too lean. Jake wasn't the only one that took precautionary measures for the rematch. Matty Bain made sure there was a canvas cover for the ring in case of rain, something that was overlooked in the previous fight. He also didn't reveal the judges until 3 minutes before the start of the main event so no one knew who they were ahead of time.



When the action started it seemed LaMotta had found his old style again and ripped into Zivic, who could not box as he did in the first fight. It was a much closer fight this time around and a poor one according to Eddie Beachler of the Pittsburgh Press. Beachler called it a mauling and wrestling brawl. Beachler also thought Zivic deserved the first fight without question but this time believed LaMotta was the one who was given the wrong verdict. Al Abrams from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, who protested that Zivic was robbed in the first fight with Jake, said it was a close fight but gave Zivic the edge off his efforts in the last round. Judge Buck McTiernan had it 8 rounds for Zivic and 7 for LaMotta. Judge Alvin Willaims had it 5 rounds for Zivic and 7 rounds for LaMotta with 3 even. Referee Ernie Sesto who had the deciding vote had it 8 rounds for Zivic and 5 for LaMotta with 2 even. This verdict gave Fritz Zivic a split decision win and revenge for his previous loss to the one-man riot Jake LaMotta.

Zivic and LaMotta would meet again in another close but controversial fight ending in a split decision win for LaMotta. This would grant them a fourth and final fight that LaMotta won by unanimous decision.