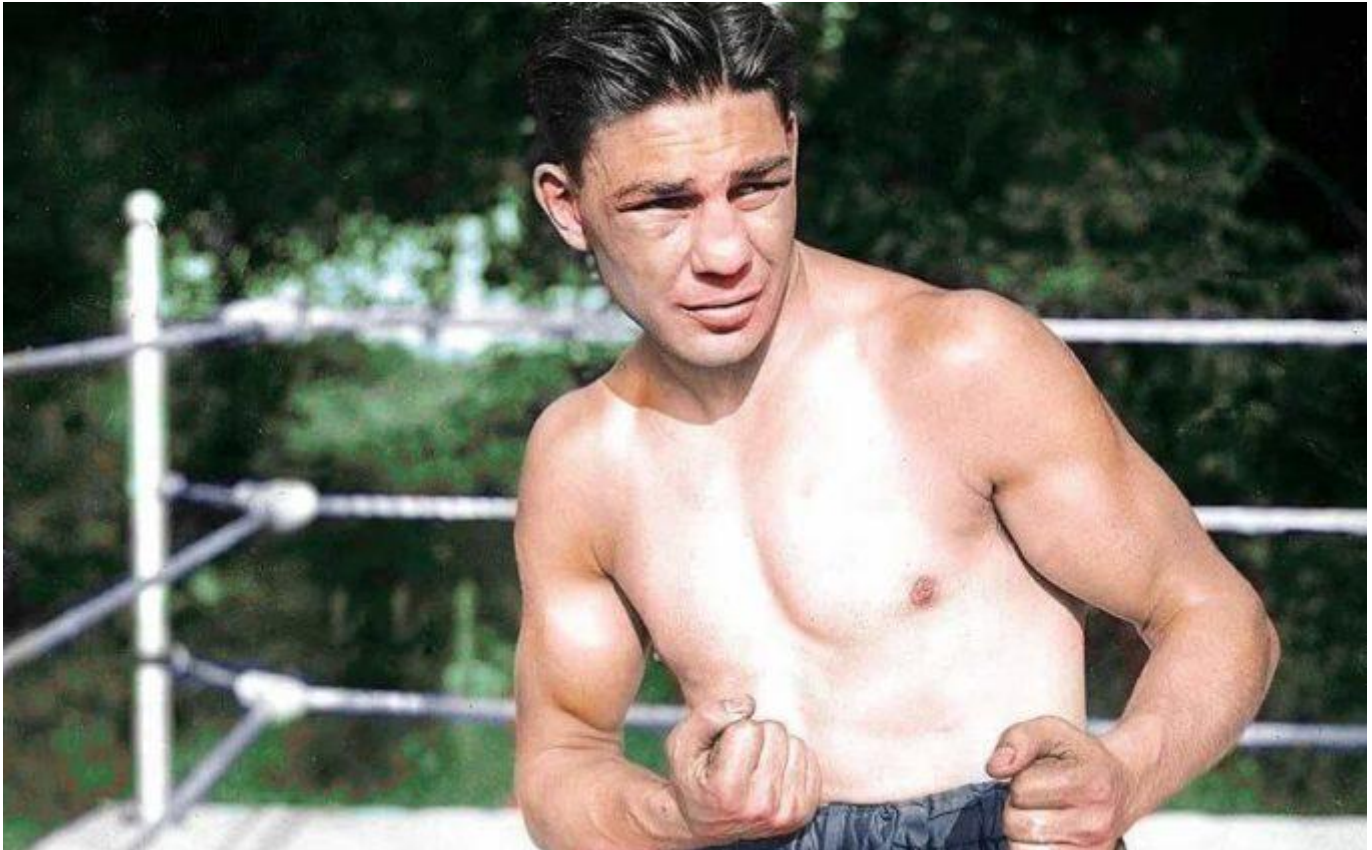


# Ezzard Charles and Harry Greb: A light-heavyweight perspective

*Does Harry Greb belong among the very best light-heavyweights?*

By Jeremiah Preisser - January 27, 2019 (The Grueling Truth)



***A colourised photo of the former middleweight king***

It's not often that the well-rounded "Cincinnati Cobra" and the workhorse "Pittsburgh Windmill" get print together, but I felt it necessary.

Lists are the culprit. These lists, more specifically of the all-time sort, are an admired mainstay in boxing fandom and can serve a useful purpose: They may provide a concise picture of historical whereabouts. It seems everyone has an opinion, too, from research institutions like the *International Boxing Research Organization*, to printed publications such as *The Ring* and *Boxing News*, to the hardcore and casual fan alike. While historians and longtime followers of the gloved-game are prone to getting it nearer to the truth, part of me feels that Harry Greb, a man widely accepted as the greatest middleweight to lace up leather and foe alike, is still undersold a division north.

Greb and Charles may not have much common ground stylistically, but their paths bear some resemblance. Each man traversed the middleweight, light-heavyweight and heavyweight classes, and yet for their two-fisted prowess they never received title shots at the 175-pound limit. Thankfully this hasn't prevented many from slapping Ezzard with the "best ever" label. But what about Greb? Does he belong in the discussion right alongside Charles and Archie Moore?

My initial motive was to shed a warm light on Harry's resume, not to argue for his ascendancy to the top. With any attempt at objective observation, however, you must let the data weave its own tale.

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### **Estimated Record at Light-Heavyweight**

Ezzard Charles: 36-2-1

Harry Greb: 83-5-3

Notes: Greb's record is harder to nail down. Fight weights were not always given, nor were divisions as well-defined. Therefore, inference was necessary for a quite a few of Greb's opponents. The final numbers are likely still skewed, but probably not by much.

When weights were available I counted fights where one or both fighters were 165+ pounds and didn't exceed 180 pounds, unless it was obvious someone was campaigning at heavyweight, ala Gene Tunney in the last Greb fight. There were a few exceptions, like Charles' victory over Anton Christoforidis. Though neither weighed 165 or greater, Christoforidis was rated in the top-10 at light-heavyweight. Greb also had a few on-the-line. An example is one of his contests with a 165-pound Chuck Wiggins who was clearing boiling down but generally mixed it up above middleweight.

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## **Number of Hall of Famers Fought and Record Against Them**

Ezzard Charles: 6—Teddy Yarosz (1-0), Ken Overlin (0-0-1), Joey Maxim (2-0), Jimmy Bivins (3-1), Lloyd Marshall (2-1) and Archie Moore (3-0)

11-2-1

Harry Greb: 8—Battling Levinsky (6-0), Billy Miske (2-0), Kid Norfolk (1-1), Tommy Gibbons (2-1), Gene Tunney (1-2-1), Tommy Loughran (4-1-1), Tiger Flowers (1-0) and Maxie Rosenbloom (1-0)

18-5-2

Notes: Charles' two defeats were clear, as he was knocked down 12 times in the back-to-back losses to Bivins and Marshall. Both occurred as he was working his way up and Ezzard got his revenge. Charles was never on the losing end at his best.

Two of Greb's defeats were hotly disputed, the second Tunney fight and the fourth bout with Loughran. Two of the losses were comprehensive, with one coming at his peak, a 6-round decision to Tommy Gibbons. The other was a DQ against Kid Norfolk that few felt was solely Greb's fault.

## **Number of Champions Fought and Record Against Them**

Ezzard Charles: 3—Joey Maxim, Gus Lesnevich and Archie Moore

5-0

Harry Greb: 5—Jack Dillon, Battling Levinsky, Mike McTigue, Tommy Loughran and Maxie Rosenbloom

15-1-1

Notes: Charles stopped Lesnevich when they were both heavyweights; Greb beat McTigue and Dillon at middleweight.

## **Historically Ranked Opponents**

Ezzard Charles: 3—Archie Moore (#1 by IBRO/#2 by *The Ring*), Jimmy Bivins (#18 by IBRO/#6 by *The Ring*) and Joey Maxim (#25 by IBRO/#14 by *The Ring*).

Harry Greb: 7—Gene Tunney (#4 by IBRO/#18 by *The Ring*), Tommy Loughran (#6 by IBRO/#4 by *The Ring*), Maxie Rosenbloom (#11 by IBRO/#8 by *The Ring*), Tommy Gibbons (#14 by IBRO/NR by *The Ring*), Jack Dillon (#16 by IBRO/#12 by *The Ring*), Battling Levinsky (#20 by IBRO/#13 by *The Ring*) and Kid Norfolk (#27 by IBRO/NR by *The Ring*).

Notes: The International Boxing Research Organization and *The Ring* were chosen on merit—one being the most prestigious historical research vehicle; the other being the sport's most recognizable publication.

NR=Not Rated

### **Highly Rated Opponents**

This category is a mixed bag for both men. Charles had World War II cut into years of his career and formal rankings didn't exist for much of Greb's. Because of this, I will note that Charles did defeat Anton Christoforidis, Archie Moore, Oakland Billy Smith and Lloyd Marshall the years they were rated. He also overcame a number of men who were at one time occupying top-10 positions, such as Fitzie Fitzpatrick, Mose Brown, Booker Beckwith, Tommy Yarosz, Erv Sarlin, Joey Maxim, Joe Kahut, and Jimmy Bivins.

Greb, for his part, had his fair share of wins over contenders. Jimmy Delaney, Jeff Smith, Tony Marullo, Bob Moha and many of the men already mentioned succumbed to Greb's relentless style.

### **(In) Conclusion**

Does the "Cobra's" superiority over Archie Moore, history's other highest-ranked 175-pounder, coupled with his dominance over his gifted rivals, trump the "Windmill's" numerically weightier résumé?

Does Charles' imperviousness at the apex of his ability mean more than Greb's fractional inconsistencies, part of which were caused by blindness in one eye?

Does the fact that the Cincinnati-native was better-suited to 175 than the physically smaller Pittsburgh-resident give him a leg up in the all-time debate?

I could pose numerous questions because there is a surplus of nuances worth considering. How you scale them is your choosing. What cannot be questioned, however, is that Harry Greb's résumé is distinguished. Ezzard Charles, nor any other light-heavyweight who could substitute here, save maybe Archie Moore,

fought this depth of competition at such a superb rate. Even Moore wasn't as consistent at the top level.

The ethnic-German took on arguably 25-30% of the 20 best light-heavyweights to ever grace the squared circle, 23% of the top-30, and 20% of the top-50. Incredibly, his overall numbers were nearly higher, as bouts with Young Stribling and Jack Delaney fell through and Georges Carpentier, Battling Siki and Paul Berlenbach wouldn't sign on the dotted line.

A reasonable tweak of a few decisions and Harry garners a 3-1/2-1-1 tally against Tunney and a 6-0/5-1 mark over Loughran.

So then, claim who you like as the King of Light-Heavies, but how is it that Greb gets a 13-spot by IBRO and completely passed over by *The Ring*?

