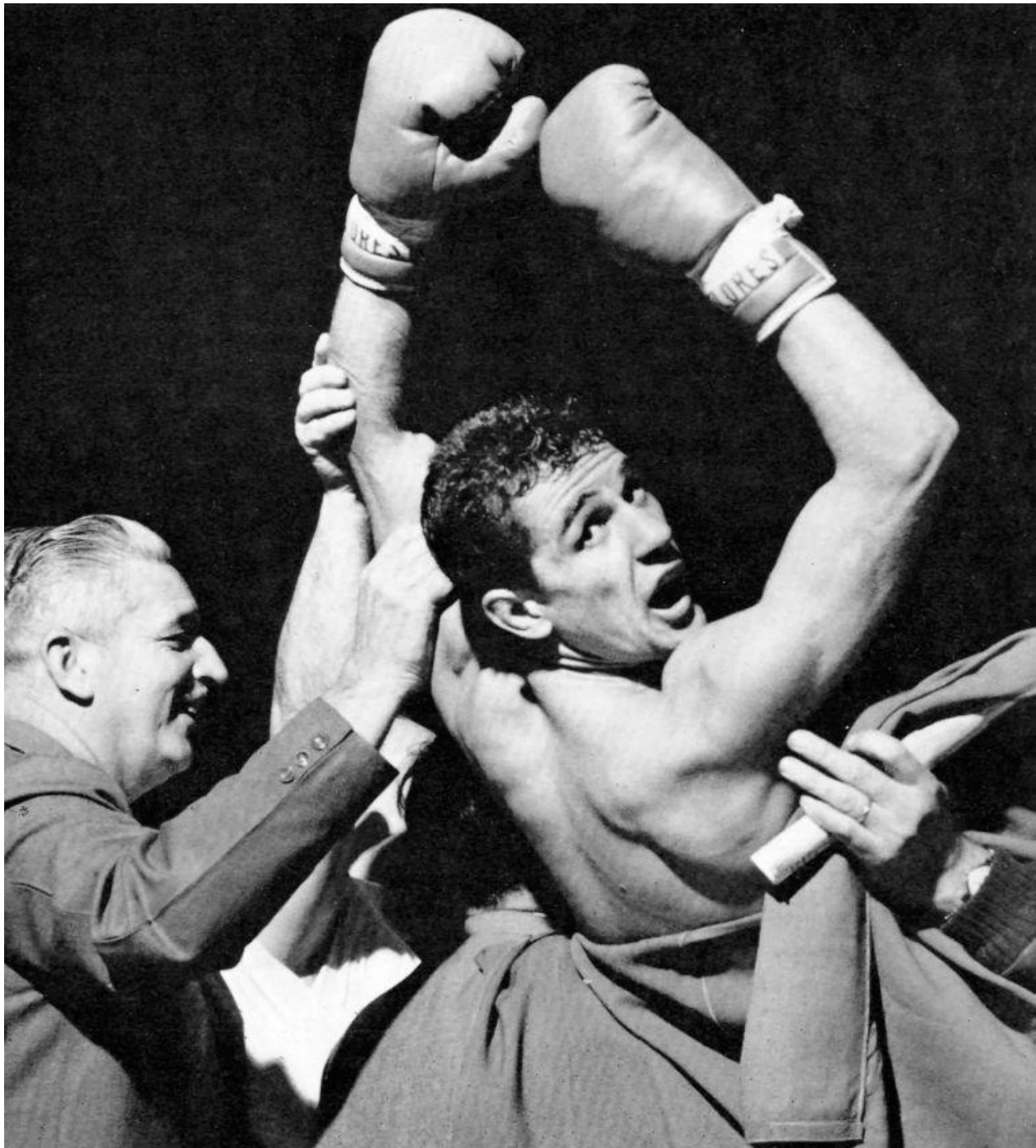


A WIN FOR ART AND BROCCOLI

EDER JOFRE, ARTIST, VEGETARIAN AND BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, KNOCKS OUT A RAW-TUNA EATER AND STAYS UNDEFEATED AFTER 45 PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS

BY GILBERT ROGIN



Vegetarianism is popularly associated with spiritual nuts with long hair and long toenails, except in the case of Popeye the Sailor Man, who, though naive, is a neat gentleman and the possessor of a heck of a right uppercut. In this corporeal tradition is Eder Jofre, a good little vegetarian like Popeye, who knocked out Herman Marquez in San Francisco last week to retain the bantamweight championship of the world and save humanity from a fate worse than vegetables. Marquez eats raw tuna, yet. "When Herman wins the title we will all eat raw fish," said Shig Takahashi, one of Marquez' managers and, happily, a lousy prophet.

Bantamweights are wee people; only flyweights and jockeys come in smaller sizes. When a reporter told a young lady that bantamweights must not weigh more than 118 pounds, she exclaimed, "Why, they shouldn't let them fight." When Jofre was posed before a big bowl of salad for a prefight picture, the photographer had to put the 1,136-page San Francisco phone book beneath him so that his face would appear above the escarole. Bantamweights are naturally short but they are unnaturally light. "What's good about raw fish," says Marquez, "is that it goes through your system. Right after the fight I'm going to have a big dish of enchiladas and tamales. It's so fattening, but I love it." Said Jofre: "To get where I have, I have sacrificed everything. No parties, not enough food or drink. This dedication is not compensated for by money, which has relative value."

When people were smaller there were bantamweights in all countries; indeed, the class limit was once 105 pounds. Now they are chiefly Latins. Jofre is a Brazilian of Italian descent who was born in a shabby gym in the Italian section of São Paulo. His father, Aristides, was an unemployed boxer. His mother, Angelina (nee Zumbano), most of whose relatives were also unemployed boxers, swept up the gym.

With 16 boxers and wrestlers in his family—including former European Middleweight Champion Hans Norbert, former Brazilian Lightweight Champion Ralf Zumbano and Lady Wrestler Olga Zumbano—there was little question what Eder would be when he grew up. At four he put on a pair of gloves. At nine he fought in public for the first time, knocking his cousin out in the third round. He lost but two fights as an amateur, and both were later redeemed by knockouts. He is undefeated as a professional, having won 32 fights by knockout and 10 by decision. He has drawn three.

Jofre's two younger brothers are now prizefighters, too; his sister is married to Brazil's amateur flyweight champion, and Eder's marriage, presided over by an excitable parish priest named Padre Ira, was so charged with references to boxing that it was, in a sense, a double ring ceremony. Padre Ira told Eder that "this is the best punch in your whole career," burred on that ' "love and boxing are alike: both require endurance, discipline and sportsmanship." Said Jofre coyly: "This is my first knockout."

Despite the overwhelming influence of his battling relatives, Jofre has developed an interest in another kind of canvas. He began by sketching bantam roosters, the symbol of his career. One of these creations was on the back of the blue velvet robe he wore up the smoky, noisy aisle in the fight with Marquez. On the back was a gold, sequined banty cock with a jeweled red comb and a tear-shaped red jewel, quavering on a thread, for a wattle. (Marquez' robe bore the legend "ILWU 54." He is a longshoreman in Stockton, Calif.)

Born in Mexico, Marquez came up from Sonora to California when he was eight or nine and went to work in the fields when he was 13, picking cherries, tomatoes, celery and asparagus, and sewing onion sacks by hand. "There's nothing to it," he says. "Just like boxing." He turned to boxing when he was 23. "Who I am is from boxing," he says. "I never had the opportunity to be someone else. Boxing's clean and it keeps yourself from doing a lot of things you shouldn't. 'Herman,' an old man told me once, 'you won't get hurt in the ring. The ring don't hurt you. The outside do.'

"This is the biggest break I ever had. I'm going to try hard to do a good job. This is the fight. Not only for myself—I'm not selfish. For my wife and my seven kids and the one that's rounding third and sliding home."

The weigh-in was genial, and its pacific mood extended into the first round, which was so mannerly it appeared that a couple of conscientious objectors had found themselves, by some sublime error, in the prize ring. There were several jabs but they were soft, drifting, as though the gloves were balloons held by children. The pace quickened in the second round, both men punching with more vehemence. Jofre unleashed his famous right for the first time, but it didn't come close.

In the third Jofre threw a right cross which landed high on Marquez' cheek. He stumbled back and partially out of the ropes. Jofre didn't take advantage of his position, waiting until Marquez untangled himself before joining battle. At the end of this round Jofre sat on his stool, talking earnestly to his father, his chief second. But even then he didn't sit in customary fashion but sort of sidesaddle. By the fourth, Marquez was beginning to throw punches in meaningful flurries, while Jofre seemed content to measure Marquez with his jab, like a corny painter holding up his thumb, while patiently waiting the proper instant to throw his right. The next round showed why many observers consider Jofre the finest prizefighter of any weight now in the ring. In it he launched a rich variety of blows, and hard ones, too, both in combination and singly; he feinted deftly with head, shoulders and hands and defended with remarkable resourcefulness. It seemed then as though he could finish Marquez whenever he took a fancy to.

Like Ingemar

This feeling was reinforced in the sixth round. Jofre again displayed his arsenal but it did not slow Herman up. Marquez kept busily jabbing, working, as they say, coming on. Marquez won the seventh round on hustle, if nothing else, Jofre growing spiritless, waiting like a miniature Ingemar Johansson for the opportunity to unload the right. In the eighth round Jofre tried several clubbing rights which drove Marquez back. But, astonishingly, Marquez mounted a counter-offensive of his own and repulsed Jofre, at one point palpably stunning him with a nifty right hand. Now it appeared, in this variable battle, that not only would Marquez, a 3-to-1 underdog, be able to withstand Jofre's heaviest blows, but could beat him off with his own. Herman turned toward his corner at the conclusion of the round and raised his glove to his brow in a kind of salute—perhaps to himself. Jofre sat on his stool, twisted as though about to milk a cow, inhaling smelling salts.

In the ninth, Marquez swept on, indomitable, confident, on several occasions bringing Jofre up short with savage hits. At this point, one judge had Marquez, incredibly, leading by 7-0, the other judge 5-1, while Referee Fred Apostoli had it for Jofre, 5-3. (In California the winner of a round gets from one to five points, the loser gets zero and a tie round isn't tabulated in the scoring.)

Like so many of life's endings, this one, too, was unexpected, even startling. The 10th round began as the ninth had ended; no one, save perhaps Jofre, was in the know. Then Jofre struck

Marquez with a right, but no more impressive a right than quite a few he had hit all along; certainly it didn't have the visible effect of the one which carried Marquez through the ropes in the third round. He followed it, however, by a right uppercut like Popeye's, and two lefts which sorely shook Marquez. Then, unopposed, Jofre battered Marquez with a sequence of swift, incisive and telling punches, about 10 of them. As Jofre paused before hitting him again, Marquez discreetly sat down. It was not valorous but it was wise. (He said later: "I wasn't hurt. I was taking a rest.") He arose at the count of four and took the rest of the mandatory eight count. Jofre waded forward, hacking away, and Marquez collapsed from all the punches to his unprotected head. He started to get to his feet, then sat down again as though he couldn't make it, looking mutely about him like a man in the bathtub after all the water has run out and he is confronted by his pale and insufficient frame.

Marquez was on the point of arising once more when Referee Apostoli stopped the fight. Two minutes and 15 seconds had elapsed in the round. On the whole, the crowd seemed to approve Apostoli's action. A few bloodthirsty goons gathered behind the section where the athletic commission was sitting and called them a bunch of yo-yos and meatballs. Instead of banning boxing, it would be a far better thing if the authorities could screen spectators and ban those who are unfit to watch. There is no doubt, of course, that Marquez could have regained his feet. But there is very little doubt that he would have succumbed again and again. Jofre was just too strong and resourceful a banger for Marquez. "I'm not a bad loser," Marquez kept saying in his dressing room. "I'm just telling the truth. I wasn't hurt." Good. That is the point.

A great Brazilian flag was carried into the ring and many hands held it above little Jofre's head like a summer pavilion. Eder's wife, Cidinha, came gravely to a corner of the ring. Jofre bent down and was silent as she tugged at his ear, pulled at the skin on his cheek. Later she went to Marquez' dressing room, shyly shook his hand and watched him as he sat in calm ruin on the rubbing table.

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