

# Ray Jefferies

by Rich Pagano

At one time, over 200 colleges and universities in the United States fielded boxing teams. At many of these colleges during the 1940's, there were more students at the boxing shows than attended the basketball games.

The first actual intercollegiate boxing match was held in 1919, when Penn State clashed with the University of Pennsylvania. However, as boxing became more popular on college campuses, the NCAA began sanctioning the sport and held its first boxing tournament at Penn State in 1932. Four years later, Ray Jefferies, representing Syracuse University, would capture the NCAA title at 165 pounds.

Jefferies spent much of his childhood in Woodlyn, Pennsylvania. It was there that he and his brother Ed began boxing for the Woodlyn Boys Club under the direction of Vince Mallon.

Ray attended Ridley Park High School, a small school in Delaware County, Southwest of the city of Philadelphia, where he competed on the track team coached by the legendary William "Doc" Cornog. However, after his junior year, he dropped out of school and went to work. During that time, he became one of our area's outstanding amateur boxers.

Delaware County boxing historian Chuck Hasson wrote, "In 1931, Ray won the middleweight and the light heavyweight championships of Delaware County and Southeastern Pennsylvania, both on the same night and both by one round knockouts at the Leiperville Arena. His remarkable feat was witnessed by over four thousand fans."

The Chester Times reported, "Ray Jefferies, Otto O'Keefe's ball of fire boxer, won both the 160 pound and 175 pound championships of Delaware County last night



*Ray Jefferies, who was one of our country's outstanding amateur boxers, captured the 1936 NCAA Championship in the light heavyweight division while boxing for Syracuse University.*

in slightly more than one round of fighting. Ray knocked out his first opponent in one minute and 22 seconds.”

Later that year, Ray also won the Middle Atlantic States and Philadelphia Golden Gloves 165 pound championship at the Philadelphia Arena.

In the fall of 1931, he went back to school. At this time, he was living in Philadelphia, and he enrolled at West Philadelphia High School, where he graduated in 1932.

While at West Phila High, Ray represented Philadelphia in the Golden Gloves Tournament at Madison Square Garden in New York. He would leave Philadelphia after school at 3:00PM, fight at 10:00PM, and then take the train back home so he could go to class the next day.

Philadelphia sportswriter Stan Baumgartner wrote, “At the age of 18, many local boxing critics believe that Ray Jefferies will represent the United States in the coming Olympics at Los Angeles.

“The youngster has made quite a remarkable record. Although weighing less than 175 pounds, he has beaten several heavyweights. Probably his outstanding triumph was his knockout of Alfred Cortez, a 262-pound colored heavyweight, at the Woodland A.C. He also won a decision over Jack Moran, present Middle Atlantic heavyweight title holder. Last year he was the 160 Middle Atlantic champion, but has since outgrew that class.”

In 1932, Ray qualified for the Olympic try-outs in Los Angeles and traveled to the west coast to compete for a spot on the U.S. team. Unfortunately, he lost a close bout in the finals to Miller, who represented the United States at the Olympics in Los Angeles. With the defeat, Ray became the Olympic alternate in the light heavyweight division.

As a result of his boxing accomplishments, Ray was given a scholarship to Syracuse University. He was recruited by Coach Roy Simmons, who not only coached boxing, but was also Syracuse’s lacrosse coach and assistant football coach.

When he arrived at Syracuse, Ray had already had 53 amateur fights. His record was an outstanding 49-4, with 36 knockouts. On the Hill, he would improve even more as a boxer.

At Syracuse, he was an honor student in Business Administration and was also active in a variety of extracurricular activities. He was elected president of the student body and was on the honor roll.

He was also a member of the track team for three years, where his coach was training him in the grueling decathlon. But Ray's real success in sports came in the boxing ring. He was runner-up at the 1934 Intercollegiate Boxing Championships and selected captain of the team in both his junior and senior years.

In 1936, Ray won the Eastern Intercollegiate title and decisioned Steece Brubaker from tiny King College in Bristol, Tennessee, to win the NCAA crown that same year. He defeated Brubaker by jabbing and hooking effectively and blocking or slipping his wide right-hand swings. Many years later, Coach Simmons recalled, "Jeff tore the guy apart and won going away. He was the best combination of a fighter with power and a boxer with skill that I ever coached."

E.C. Wallenfeldt, in his book, "The Six Minute Fraternity", wrote, "In 1949, on the eve of the tournament, a group of college boxing experts involved in a discussion of the sport decided to select the all-time team from competitors in the NCAA tournament up to 1949. They all chose Jefferies as their light heavyweight."

With his victory, Ray qualified for the 1936 Olympic Trials. However, because of a heart murmur, which had recently been detected, Ray was never able to fight again. Instead, he entered graduate school at Syracuse and received his Masters Degree in 1941.

During the war, he taught political science at Blue Ridge College and then Clemson University. Later, he spent two years as a professor at Princeton University before retiring from college teaching.

In 1947, he moved to Media, Pennsylvania, where he spent the rest of his life working as an investor. On May 12, 1966, Ray Jefferies died at the young age of 53. He was truly one of the greatest amateur boxers in the history of the sport.