

## Remembering The Great Ring Announcer Dan Tobey

BY Arne K. Lang

The late Chuck Hull will be formally enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame this summer with the Class of 2022. Hull, who is entering the Hall in the Non-Participant category, began his career as a ring announcer when boxing in Las Vegas was small potatoes and rode the wave that saw the city flower into the boxing capitol of the world.

Hull's assignments included such iconic fights as Hearns-Leonard I and Hearns-Hagler. He announced all the fights in HBO's heavyweight championship series which culminated with Mike Tyson defeating Tony Tucker to unify the world heavyweight title. He was also the boxing ring announcer for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

Hull, who died in 2010 at age 75, becomes the sixth ring announcer to enter the Canastota shrine. He was preceded by Joe Humphries (1997), Michael Buffer (2012), Jimmy Lennon Jr (2013), Jimmy Lennon Sr. (2017), and Johnny Addie (2018). On the outside looking in is the late Dan Tobey. That there is yet no plaque for Tobey on the Wall of Fame is an egregious oversight.

Born in 1878 in the little town of Ulysses, Nebraska, Dan Tobey began his announcing career at Naud's Junction, an arena in Los Angeles that took its name from the informal name of the streetcar stop. Several internationally important fights were staged at Naud's Junction, which opened in 1905 and closed in 1913. Tobey also worked at the Vernon Arena which opened in 1908 and housed numerous shows during California's 4-round era (1915-1924) when the state law dictated that all matches be conducted under amateur rules.



**Dan Tobey**

Before this onerous law took effect, Vernon, an independent municipality five miles south of downtown Los Angeles, was the site of many big fights. None aroused as much debate as the July 4, 1912 scrap between Ad Wolgast and Mexican Joe Rivers, a lightweight title match that ended with simultaneous knockout punches in the 13<sup>th</sup> round. Tobey would call this the most exciting fight with which he was ever involved.

Tobey was in Europe during World War I. He handled the announcing duties at the boxing tournament in Paris arranged by Gen. John J. Pershing, commander of the

American Expeditionary Forces, to celebrate the end of the War. (Among the competitors was Gene Tunney.) When he returned to Southern California, new sporting venues were sprouting.

The first iteration of the fabled Hollywood Legion Stadium, originally an open-air facility, opened in 1919. During its heyday, the arena housed weekly boxing and wrestling shows. As would be true of Jimmy Lennon the Elder, Tobey handled both enterprises.

The motion picture crowd wasn't big on wrestling, but turned out in droves for the weekly boxing shows. Hollywood celebrities mingled with everyday folk before, during, and after the matches, giving the cozy arena a special glow, even on nights when the bill of fare was straight from Palookaville.

Writing in 1925, Damon Runyon observed that Hollywood was so thick with celebrities that farmers absent-mindedly hitched their horses to them. Dan Tobey, it would be written, introduced more famous people than any person in history. In addition to all the movie stars, the list included such notables as Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Lindbergh, Will Rogers, and Babe Ruth.

Tobey's workload increased when the Olympic Auditorium opened in 1925. The Olympic ran shows on Wednesdays, the Hollywood Legion on Fridays, and Tobey worked both venues. The Olympic Auditorium attracted a different crowd than Hollywood Legion Stadium – far more blue-collar, somewhat rowdier, and eventually overwhelmingly Mexican – but Tobey was comfortable in both worlds.

Los Angeles Times sportswriter Steve Springer made an interesting observation about old-time ring announcers. "(They) sounded like auctioneers," he wrote, "like the old newspaper vendors who yelled out headlines from street corners." Dan Tobey was like that, which didn't make him inferior to any of the current practitioners, merely different. He was well-equipped for his role, a role he assumed before the advent of electronic voice amplification. Dan Tobey, someone said, was born with a megaphone in his lungs.

Snippets from old movies (check out Tobey playing himself in "The Prizefighter and the Lady," the 1935 MGM release starring Max Baer and Myrna Loy) reveal another facet of Tobey's announcing style that sets him apart from the moderns. He was more animated; he didn't stand in one spot.

Tobey wasn't nearly as svelte as the Lennons – the first digit of Tobey's waist size was undoubtedly a "4" – but he was very light on his feet. He had a bounce in his step and when he welcomed a dignitary into the ring to take a bow, he had a rather fiendish

expression on his face that said there was no other place in the whole wide world that he would rather be at that moment.

Of course, the top ring announcers today have no choice but to stand rigidly as they rattle off the particulars. They are on TV and must look into the camera, even if that means facing only one quadrant of the audience.

Dan Tobey didn't customarily wear a tuxedo (Jimmy Lennon Sr. would be erroneously credited with starting this practice). At times Tobey was pictured inside the ropes in a gray business suit, at other times wearing a dark suit jacket with white slacks, but finding nice duds was never a problem. During the daytime hours, he was the floor manager of a high-end men's clothing store.

Dan Tobey was 74 years old when he retired in 1952. On Jan. 23, 1953, he was feted at a banquet arranged by California sportswriters. The master of ceremonies that evening was Jimmy Lennon the Elder.

Somewhere – perhaps buried in a trove of old Lennon family photos – there must be a photograph of Jimmy Lennon Sr and Dan Tobey standing or seated side-by-side. If such a photo exists, it would be a remarkable artifact. Between the two of them, they brightened the southern California boxing scene for an uninterrupted span of almost 90 years!

Dan Tobey passed away three years later at age 78. “Gone but not forgotten,” goes the cliché, but Tobey has thus far been forgotten by the folks in Canastota, an oversight that will hopefully be rectified sometime down the road.

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***An earlier version of this story appeared at [TheSweetScience.com](https://thesweetscience.com). Arne K. Lang's latest book, titled "George Dixon, Terry McGovern and the Culture of Boxing in America, 1890-1910," will shortly roll off the press. The book, published by McFarland, can be pre-ordered directly from the publisher (<https://mcfarlandbooks.com/product/clash-of-the-little-giants>) or via Amazon.***