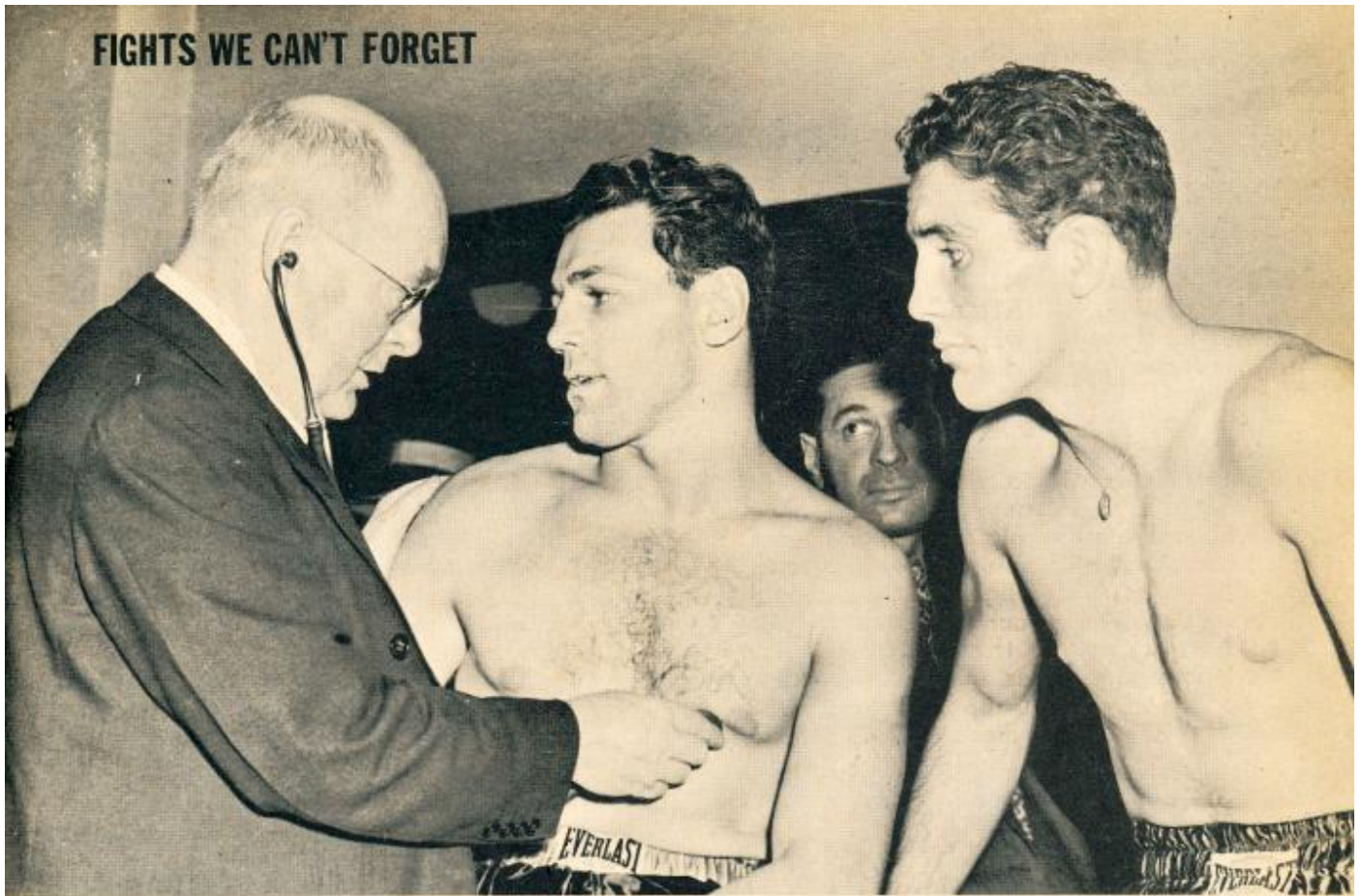


## FIGHTS WE CAN'T FORGET



Billy Conn waits his turn as Dr. William Walker examines Bob Pastor at the weigh-in for their 15-round heavyweight match.

# The Night Billy Conn Fought Bob Pastor

*After relinquishing his light heavyweight title, Conn was taking his first big step towards his ultimate goal — a shot at heavyweight champion Joe Louis.*

TO THE 14,448 RESTLESS FANS, the two fighters presented a study in contrast as they climbed into the ring at Madison Square Garden on the night of Sept. 6, 1940. One was a lean, hungry Irishman stepping out of the light heavyweight class in a bid for Joe Louis's crown. The other was a veteran heavyweight who had fought the Brown Bomber twice and was seeking still another crack at the title.

Cockiness was written all over Billy Conn's face. The year before he had whipped Melio Bettina to capture the light heavy crown and then had defended it three times—once against Bet-

tina and twice against Gus Lesnevich. Now he was ready to demonstrate that he could be just as good as a heavyweight. There were many who doubted it. As one fan put it: "Billy is a helluva boxer—but he's still a light heavy. Why, he weighed-in at only 174 for tonight's bout!"

Feelings about veteran Bob Pastor, the ex-collegian, were mixed. The fans still remembered how he had got on his bicycle in his first fight with Louis in January of 1937. Bob had tried the same trick in the second bout, when Joe was champion, but Louis had finally flattened him in

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*Pastor (Initialed trunks) left his bicycle home and decided to slug it out. But Conn proved more than a match for him.*

*Pastor landed some good blows in the early rounds. Then Billy started bombing away and hit him almost at will.*



*In the ninth, Billy staggered Pastor with a right, then floored him for a count of seven.*

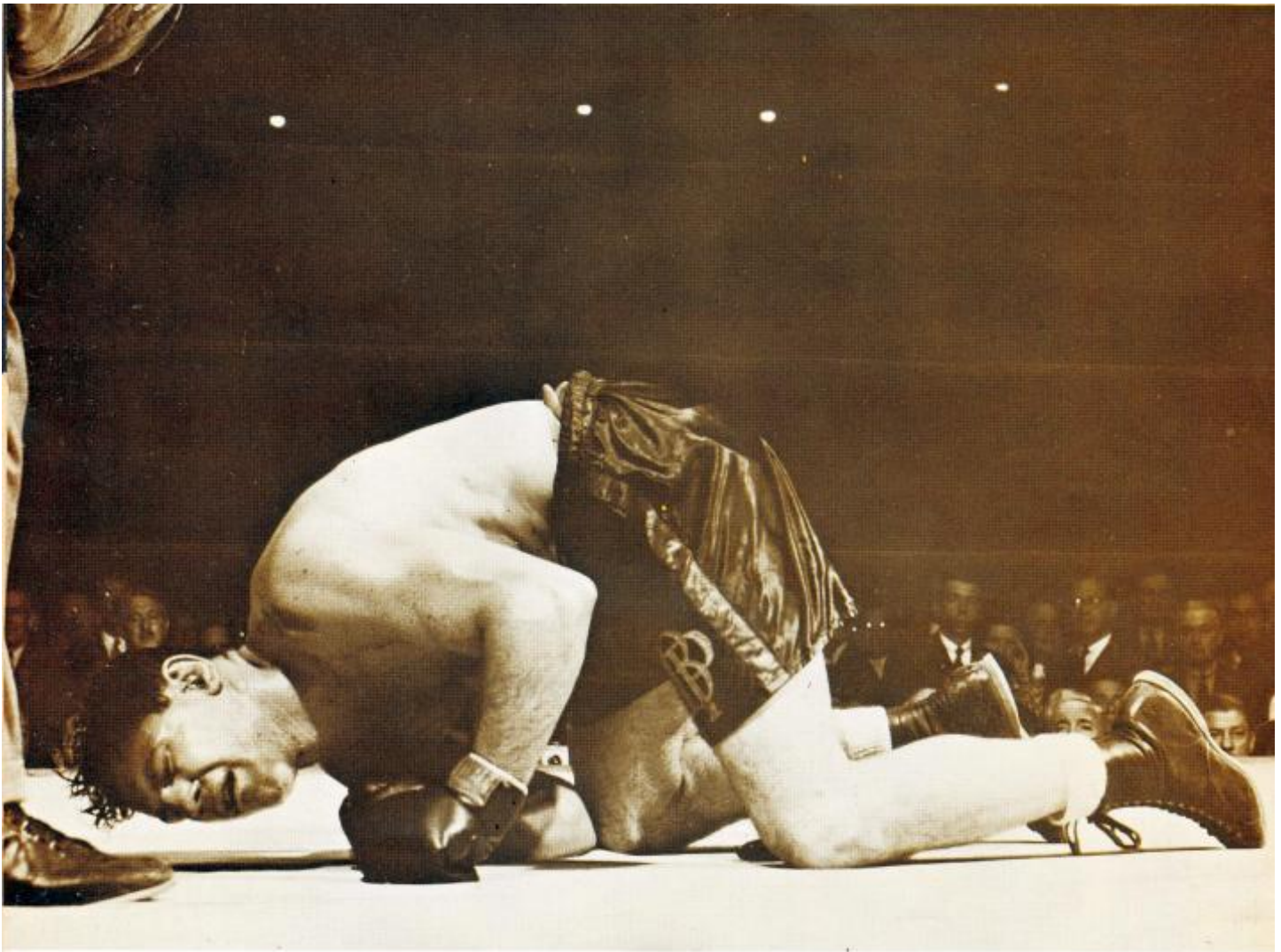
*Pastor plops down on his knees and elbows after Conn blasted him through the ropes in the 12th. He took a nine-count and was slugging away at the bell.*

the 11th stanza of that scheduled 20-rounder. Still, Pastor had one big thing going for him: only five other fighters had been able to last 10 or more rounds with Louis in 47 fights.

This feat, such as it was, didn't cut any ice with Conn, the Pittsburgh "dancing master." If Pastor decided to ride his bicycle, Billy would teach him. And if Bob decided to slug, Billy could take care of him in that department too

as he had done in his fights with Fred Apostoli, Bettina and Lesnevich.

Pastor, scaling 180 $\frac{3}{4}$  pounds, decided to slug. It was a mistake. For 12 furious rounds, Conn blasted away at his belly. In the ninth, he moved "upstairs" when Pastor left his chin unguarded. Down went Bob, assuming an odd stance—he was bent forward on his knees, propped up by his left glove and right elbow. The bell saved



*His face twisted in agony, Pastor gamely tries to get up in the fatal 13th. But he couldn't make it and was counted out at 2:54.*

him at the count of seven.

By the 12th, Conn was tagging Pastor almost at will. Midway in the round, referee Billy Cavanaugh warned Billy against hitting low. It was the third time he had cautioned the Irishman. So Billy shifted his attack to the head and blasted Pastor right through the ropes. The crowd went wild as the glassy-eyed New Yorker slid back into the ring and the referee started counting. At nine, Pastor struggled to his feet and was slugging away at the bell.

Despite the knockdown, Conn lost the round because of low blows. He lost two others for the same reason. In the 13th, Billy came charging out with murder in his eyes. He rocked Pastor with a couple of left hooks. Then, coming out of a clinch, he threw a blinding left-right-left combination to the body and it was all over.

Or was it? Some ringsiders thought the final left hook had gone foul. Others disagreed. Referee Cavanaugh muddled matters by announcing

afterward that Pastor would have won the round if he had got up before the 10 count. He explained: "The rule says a boxer who is fouled must get up before the count of 10. Pastor didn't. Therefore I had no alternative but to count him out."

Pastor's manager, excitable Jimmy Johnston, was apoplectic. He threatened to lodge an official protest that his fighter had been knocked out by a foul blow. "He has marks on his groin and is nauseated," Johnston bellowed, adding: "I don't know what kind of a rule that is—that a man can be knocked out by a foul blow."

Johnston's protest got him nowhere. Whatever the merit of his argument, one thing was sure: Conn had completely outclassed his game opponent. Billy rode to a title shot with Joe Louis on the basis of his victory over Pastor, only to blow his chance by making the same mistake Pastor had made with him: he decided to slug it out with the champ. ■