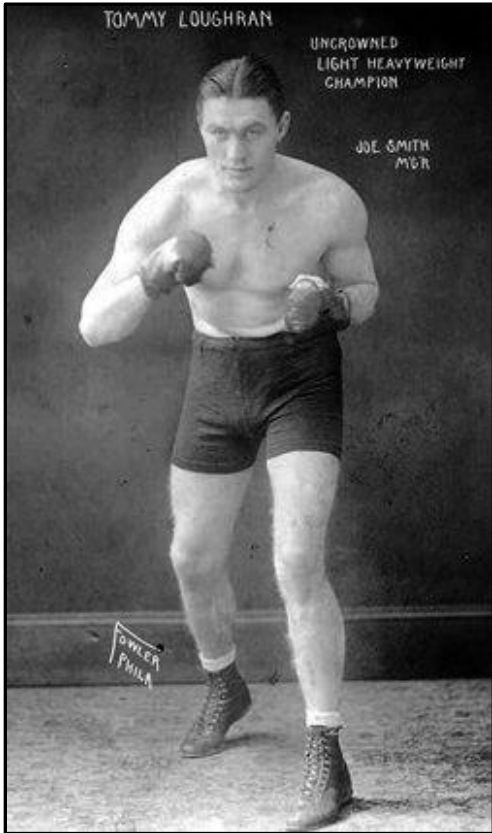


Boxing Ringside With Bobby Franklin

Loughran Vs Walker Staying off the Ropes



Recently, I watched footage of the 1929 fight between Mickey Walker and Tommy Loughran. This was a ten-round fight for Loughran's light heavyweight title. It was a classic match-up of a slugger vs a boxer and a delight to watch.

A film of the entire fight is not available, but the eight minutes that do exist give a pretty good sense of how the fight went and showcase the amazing skills of both fighters.

Tommy was on a winning streak that had run to 35 straight fights over the previous four years. He



came into the bout with 110 fights under his belt and, remarkably, had only been stopped once when he couldn't continue, suffering a broken rib in his 11th fight in 1920.

Mickey had held the world welterweight and middleweight titles and now had his eye on the bigger prize: winning the heavyweight title. Walker had 106 bouts coming into the fight. Mickey had only been stopped three times during that period. The first two stoppages came at the beginning of his career in 1919. The third was because of a bad cut that was caused by a head butt in his fight with Joe Dundee in 1926. Coming into the fight, Mickey was riding a 16-fight winning streak and hadn't lost in nearly four years.

Loughran wasn't known for his punching power. In fact, in a career comprising 170 fights with only 25 losses, he only scored 14 knockouts. This lack of power didn't stop him from defeating many all-time greats and gaining a reputation as near or at the top of the best light heavyweights ever to enter the ring.

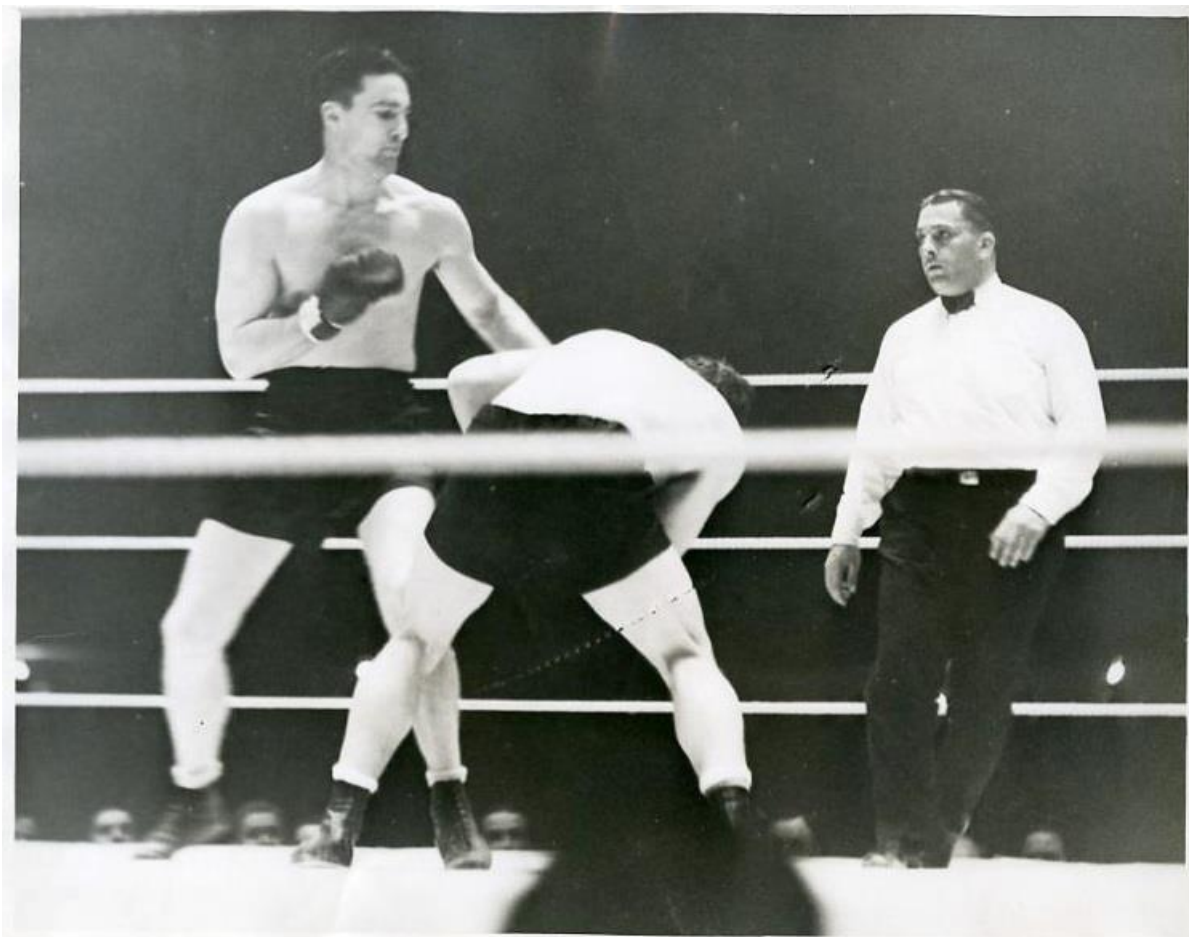
Mickey Walker had a reputation for being a tremendous puncher. In his career of 164 fights, 59 of his defeated opponents did not make it to the final bell. But make no mistake: Walker also

possessed terrific speed along with his hard punching. He would also go on to be rated as an all-time great.

On March 28, 1929, these two legendary fighters stepped into the ring at Chicago Stadium and did not disappoint. Even though the fight did not end in a knockout, it was a terrific display of the art of boxing. In many ways, it resembled a great dance piece, but the protagonists threw lethal blows.

Walker put the pressure on throughout the match but was not wild or reckless. Both men feinted for openings and looked to take advantage when one took the bait. Though Walker's speed was considerable, he couldn't match Tommy's fleetness of foot. It's no wonder Loughran was called the Philadelphia Phantom.

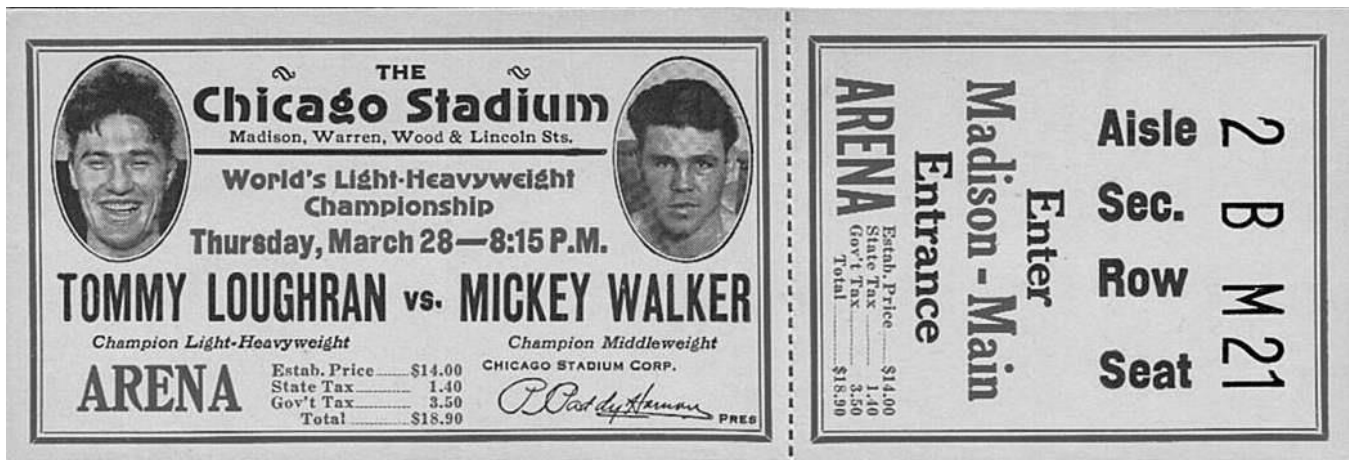
Loughran's jab was almost perfect, finding the target time and again. Mickey tried hard to counter that left but couldn't connect solidly as Tommy was in constant motion.



Pic. Tommy Loughran jabbing Mickey Walker

This is not to say Walker didn't land some good shots, and he was always a threat with his power.

In some ways, this fight resembled the Dempsey/Tunney fights, with Loughran in the role of Tunney and Walker being sharper than Dempsey, who had been laid off for three years before facing Gene.



At the end of ten rounds, Loughran received the decision. Two judges and just about everyone at ringside had the champion comfortably ahead. For some reason the referee saw it differently and scored the fight for Walker.

One thing to notice about this fight, which was common in fights from the era, was that the men spent very little time near or on the ropes. Walker wasn't looking to "trap" Loughran on the strands. Fighters didn't fight off the ropes then or try to keep their opponents there. They tended to stay in motion. They also looked to counter when their opponents threw a punch, not just pound on the arms while standing still up against the ropes.

It's incredible to see the amount of footwork used in these Golden Era bouts. Fighters, both sluggers and boxers, were always moving.

Even when they fell into a clinch, which didn't happen often, they were quick to break, often before the referee intervened.

Watching Loughran vs. Walker, you see how these men used the entire ring. They would throw punches while moving. Neither had to set himself before throwing a punch, as they were always balanced and could deliver a punch from any position. They would slip and counter while moving on their feet. This was true artistry. Though only eight minutes long, the footage of this fight is quite interesting to watch. It is a window into another time when boxers understood the art form.

On a side note, Tommy Loughran was brought in to spar Jack Dempsey before the first Tunney fight. By all accounts, he gave Jack quite the time of it. Loughran was probably a bit faster than Tunney but didn't have the power Gene possessed. It would have been interesting to see how Tommy would have fared against Jack in 1926. Another "what if" to think about.