

## The Tragedy of George A. Fulljames

### By Robert B Carson

As a gentle, summer wind blew across the quiet Dakota plains; a strange and surrealistic scene was being played out in the early morning hours.

A mixed crowd of cowboys, gamblers, drifters, and all around con-men, crowded into a barn to witness a fight to the finish.

It was close to two o'clock, Saturday morning, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1888, at Frank Church's horse barn, located on the corner of forth and Kittson, in Grand Forks, Dakota Territory and the sports were anxious to see some action.

Word had gotten round that the well known, prizefighter, George Fulljames, lightweight, Canadian champion was to face an undisclosed opponent according to the Marquis of Queensberry Rules.

No doubt it was the need for money that brought Fulljames to the Dakota Territory to such a setting.

Born in London, England on February 13, 1852, Fulljames began his professional boxing career in 1867 beating such tough stalwarts as Young Spider, Mouse Olwright and Young Cousins.

Relocating to Canada in 1880, Fulljames won over Young Collins in 37 minutes with bare knuckles. He decisioned Jack King in 18 rounds of a glove fight and, along the way George won the Canadian Lightweight championship.

Moving to New York City, he racked up more wins and in 1883 and 84, George kept a sporting saloon located at Thirty First Street and Sixth Avenue.

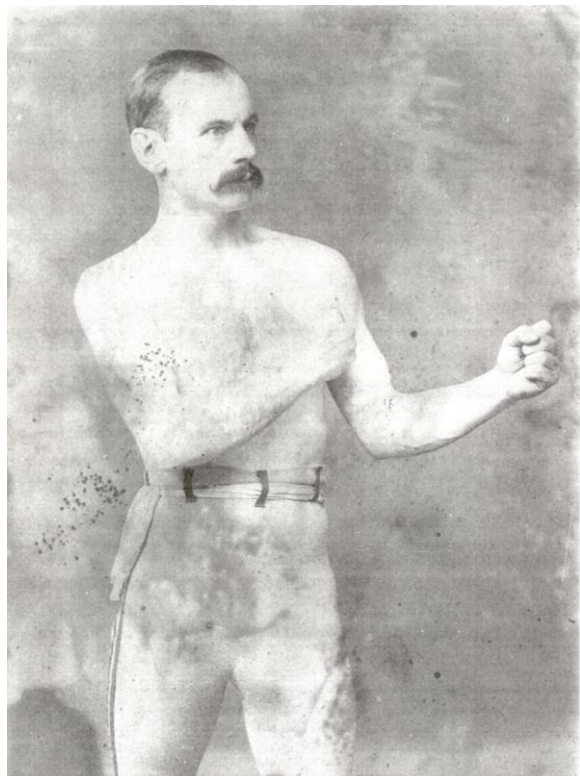
Who was this little terror, by the way of Canada, that was making a name for himself? A spare man at five foot, four and one half inches and weighing between 122-130 pounds, with jug ears and an over bite, George didn't appear the man killer one would imagine.

A receding hairline with a neat part was quickly clipped close to the skull for fighting. The luxurious, handle bar mustache was also shorn, as was the custom in the old, prize fight days.

On July 30, 1884, Fulljames fought the immortal Nonpareil, Jack Dempsey with skin tight, driving gloves and in round 22 was knocked out. He never recovered from this set back.

After this defeat the frail looking, little, innocuous pug took whatever fight he could get. Back to Canada to win a decision over Harry Gilmore, then to Detroit for an exhibition bout against Billy McLean in 1886.

It was apparent to George that his services were no longer in demand and the future looked bleak.



Over the next couple of years, not much was made public about George Fulljames' activities. In June, 1887 a small blurb in the Police Gazette stated he was training a Featherweight named McDole whom he wanted to match at \$500, but, nothing came of it.

Another year of silence until August 25, 1888, George fought Billy Trotter at the Grand Forks, Dakota's Opera House. It was a rough affair with Trotter picking up Fulljames and throwing him heavily, resulting in a Fulljames victory on a sixth round foul.

Hope springs eternal, and one can imagine George Fulljames's thinking this latest win would bring him back to being a viable contender, and a badly needed payday.

So, it was the fateful fight around for mid-summer in an improvised barn. It was a loosely organized affair with an unnamed opponent.

In the early hours of that Saturday morning a good crowd was collecting at Church's barn. Cowboys with broad brimmed sombreros, gamblers with derbies and Indians wrapped in blankets all mingled with wealthy businessmen and ranchers.

Upon entering the dimly lit interior they passed through the office into the main barn arena. The smell of hay and horse sweat mingled with the pungent odor from the kerosene lantern hanging from the center of the barn. The eerie glow made the spectators faces look like demons from Dante's Inferno.

A sort of ring was formed with the audience. In the center was the husky, young fighter they called

"Tramp" or "Hobo", surrounded by his handlers. Tramp was dancing and jumping up and down to loosen up.

Presently, George Fulljames came out of the crowd as both men met in the center.

Both fighters had close-cropped hair and wore boxing tights and boxing shoes. On Fulljames' fists were a pair of skin tight driving gloves while no gloves at all were on Tramp's hands. He simply refused to wear any sort of glove, preferring to use bare knuckles.

There was a brief discussion of the rules and as the fight was about to get underway, Fulljames extended his right hand for the ceremonial, pre-fight handshake. His head was down with a slight smile on his face. Tramp quickly shook Fulljames hand and at the same time, threw a hard left hook, smacking Fulljames flush on the right temple.

George staggered then they fell into a clinch. Two spectators separated them. Loud cries of "foul" could be heard above the din.

After parting the two fighters, no one called time. They went to blows and clinched again. Separated, both fighters again started milling with Tramp being the aggressor. After much prodding from the frenzied crowd, time was finally called.

Fulljames staggered back to his corner with blood running down the right side of his head. The fight wore on doggedly. Both battlers fell with Fulljames landing on the top of Tramp. There were more clinches and at the end of three rounds George complained of being sick to his stomach.

Pale and shaken, Fulljames backers led him to his corner and sat him on a wooden box near the door. He was declared winner of the fight due to the foul committed by Tramp in the first round. George Fulljames sat dazed as blood trickled down the right side of his bruised face. Trying to talk, he muttered, "That first blow dazed me and I just couldn't recover."

Nausea over took him and he vomited blood. By now the excited crowd knew there was something terribly wrong with the diminutive, Canadian fighter and with a cry a mad dash was made for the exits.

Helping hands picked up the stricken fighter and placed him on a make shift bed in the barn office. George was limp and his eyes barely opened as he lapsed into unconsciousness. With that, George A. Fulljames, Lightweight Champion of Canada, was left alone and unattended with only two barn cats to stand vigil.

At seven o'clock, the following morning, a doctor, who had been urged to investigate, found George, still dressed in his blood stained right tights and shoes, in a dying state. Enlisting the help of some stable hands the comatose fighter was carried to his room.

By now the law enforcement officers were looking for Tramp and others involved in the deadly

affair. Tramp had hung around town as was nabbed and thrown in jail. He said his name was Barrett and he was innocent of any wrong doing.

Information surfaced that Tramp was, in fact, a husky professional, prize fighter from the East named Jack Barrett or Burnett. It was further learned he had been brought in as a "ringer" for the express purpose to "do in" Fulljames, and his handful of backers, at any expense.

It was also common knowledge that, for some time, George Fulljames hadn't been well. The defeat from Dempsey plus ring wear and drinking too much had sapped his incentive and strength.

For most of the day George's still form laid in his room not stirring a muscle. Just as the warm sun stated it's afternoon descent on the Dakota plains, George A. Fulljames, English born and Lightweight Champion of Canada, lost his last battle.

To add to the drama, as the constable and his deputies were downtown, someone broke the lock on the station house door, allowing Barrett and several other prisoners to escape. A diligent search failed to find any trace of Barrett. It would not take too much imagination to figure out it was the local sports backing Barrett that were responsible.

In the evening a coroner's inquest was held, despite the reluctance of the witnesses to testify. The postmortem revealed "no external wounds except one confused wound on the right temple-recent. The organs were all normal, except obliteration of the left pleura by old and firm adhesions and a recent blood clot in the right temporal region, the latter being the cause of death."

Corner, Doctor A.P. Rounsvell stated that this concluded his work, and as far as he was concerned, no further investigation would be made. So, with a stroke of the pen the life and death of a man was closed for good.

Doctor Irwin put Fulljames body in a coffin, placed him on a horse drawn cart and took the remains back to Canada.

George Fulljames was buried on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September in Winnipeg where his wife and brother lived. A large crowd of friends and sports were on hand to bid the brave, little fighter farewell.

What happened to Jack "Tramp" Barrett, and the local thugs who set up the fatal fight, has been lost with the passage of time.

The real tragedy, in the death of George Fulljames, was knowing this likeable, little battler, with the overbite, died abandoned by the very fans that he strove so hard to please. His life's fluid draining on the dusty ground of an ill lit horse barn without one kind, loving touch to give him comfort. It was a long way from his warm, loving home in Winnipeg.

It doesn't speak well for human nature.