

ERIC BOON versus ROBERT VILLEMMAIN

DOMESTIC FIGHT OF THE YEAR 1948

BY DEREK O'DELL



ERIC BOON (England)

As a main support to the brief top-liner in which Freddie Mills eclipsed Ken Shaw, Jack Solomons headed a superb Harringay supporting bill with an attractive ten-rounder that paired the European welterweight champion Robert Villemain against Eric Boon - one time 'golden boy' of British boxing and in distant days before the war, a favourite at Jack's old palace of sock, the Devonshire Club.

Boon was young then, and burned with ambition and a surfeit of energy that is the province of only the young. He had thrilled the Harringay patrons with a savage display of punching and never-say-die spirit when he came from behind to stop Arthur Danahar in one of the best contests ever to be seen at that popular venue. That was in 1939 at the lightweight limit. Eric was now a welterweight. His halcyon days had gone and some of that 'golden' image had tarnished thanks to comparative inactivity during the war years, but he still packed a wallop and was seldom in a dull fight. He still retained enough of his former power to trouble the best men in the country but to



ROBERT VILLEMMAIN (France)

to the cognoscenti, it looked as if in taking on this formidable European champion, he was biting off more than he could chew. Yet, on this April evening in 1948, he dredged up some of the fire and spirit of his vintage years and gave one of his bravest, gamest and heroic performances

Villemain was one of the better fighters to emerge from France in those early post-war years. He'd won the European title in his native Paris by stopping our own Ernie Roderick and was destined to become a top contender and a challenger for the world title. His aim now was to establish himself as a leading middleweight - the division where his fellow-countryman Marcel Cerdan ruled the roost. Villemain's fistic pedigree can be gauged by his showing against Sugar Ray Robinson later in 1948. After beating highly-rated Laurent Dauthille, he took the great "Sugarman" to a very close points decision, and Ray was a superb fighting machine at the time - already an all-time great and nearing the peak of his career. 23

Boon and Villemain clashed like two

gladiators. Both were men reluctant to take a backward step and both could hit. Punches bounced off of their well-muscled frames as each sought to establish supremacy. Boon threw punches hell-for-leather in the first four rounds, and his rival willingly joined in. The crowd loved it and the sound of the bell could scarcely be heard above the din.

In the fifth round, the old Boon - menacing and dynamite-punching, broke through. Villemain was hurt and hurt badly, but he stood his ground, ducked some flak and got through with a left just before the bell that put Boon down for a count of two. Throughout Boon's attack, the Frenchman never missed an opportunity to stick his left in his rival's face. Both men put in some beautiful left-hand work. These probing punches were interspersed with short hooks that carried all the power that the men could muster.

Boon was well on top in round six. He staggered his man and moved in for the kill, but the blitz, similar to that which finished Danahar, didn't have the same effect on the tough Frenchman. Villemain took all that Boon could throw at him and groggily turned cagey for a couple of rounds until the strength returned to his legs. He then smashed back at Boon who being equally as game, took it all and came back with two dynamite left hooks. The din was terrific!

Eric was flat-footed by the ninth, but he sucked in a deep breath, and in what looked like his final fling, systematically pummelled the Frenchman all around the ring. Villemain would not submit. He got a burst of applause for standing up to the punishment and remarkably, was soon back on the offensive. The round ended with Boon on the canvas and near to exhaustion.

The one minute's respite seemed to instil fresh life into his frame. One round to go: could he do it? Oh, how Boon tried! I can see those magnificent shoulders of his now as they trajected hammer blows to the target standing square-on in front of him.

Villemain was waiting for an opening and when he saw one, he struck hard. Boon was down and he was hurt. He took a count of nine, got up and forced the pace! To stand square-on and to trade punches with his strength ebbing was exciting, it was magnificent but it was also foolhardy. The snap had left his punches and Villemain put him back on the canvas with a left hook. Slowly, Boon got to his knees, but exhaustion and

despair were etched on his face. Try as he may, there wasn't the energy left in him to beat the count. He knelt there, hands dangling at his sides and looked despairingly at the referee as the count proceeded. There were five seconds to go. Five seconds between defeat and victory. What a pity there had to be a loser!



VILLEMMAIN and BOON at the WEIGH-IN

**BOXING
MEMORABILIA SALE**

NOVOTEL
LONDON, HAMMERSMITH.
HAMMERSMITH INTERNATIONAL CENTRE,
1 SHORTLANDS, LONDON W6

SATURDAY 12TH OCTOBER 2002 2pm-6pm

OVER 30 STALLS
SELLING EVERYTHING
PAST TO PRESENT





THE BRITISH BOXING BOARD OF CONTROL
IN ASSOCIATION WITH LONSDALE SPORTS

FOR FURTHER DETAILS PHONE KYMBERLY TAYLOR AT
THE LONSDALE INTERNATIONAL SPORTING CLUB
47 BEAK STREET, LONDON W1F 9SE

TELEPHONE: 0207 434 1290 FAX: 0207 734 2094
OR CONTACT KYMBERLY OR CHAS TAYLOR DIRECT ON
0208 361 3429