

JACKIE FIELDS

Born Jacob Finkelstein, Feb 9, 1908;

Died June 3, 1987

Career record: W-72 (29 kayos); L-9; D-2; ND-2; NC-1

Legend has it that Chicago-born Jackie Fields took his ring name from either a Chicago department store or in honor of an obscure fighter named Marty Fields. Jackie, an Olympic gold medal winner in 1924 at featherweight, turned pro in September 1924.

Fighting mostly out of Los Angeles, Fields won 8 of his first 9 bouts, his lone blemish being a draw. Since Jackie had won a gold medal, his career began with a measure of fanfare and instant identification. Buoyed by his early success and the temptation of a \$5000 purse (very large shekels for a basically prelim fighter in 1925), the 17-year-old prototype L.A. "Golden Boy," made the huge mistake of stepping way up in class and jumping into the ring with one of boxing's all-time greats "Babyface" Jimmy McLarnin on November 12, 1925. At that point, McLarnin had 34 pro bouts with only one loss. "Babyface" brutalized Fields with five knockdowns in 2 rounds, finally putting Jackie away for the count with a vicious right cross. That was the only time in his 10-year career that Fields would lose by kayo.

By 1927 Fields had grown into the lightweight division and on April 4th he fought the reigning lightweight champion, Sammy Mandell, in a 12-round, no-decision bout. Mandell had refused to put his title on the line, which turned out to be a good call, because according to contemporary accounts Fields won handily. Jackie won the rest of his bouts that year with the exception of his bout with former featherweight champion, the great, Lewis "Kid" Kaplan (L-10). His highlight bout that year was a convincing non-title 10 round decision on November 22 over current jr. welterweight champion & fierce rival for the affections of the L.A. fight crowd, Mushy Callahan. By year's end, the still growing 20-year-old lad was a full-fledged welterweight.

Facing nothing but top of the line competition, Fields also won all but one of his bouts in 1928. The lone loss was to nemesis Sammy Mandell in another non-title bout (L-10). The year's high points were two victories over future middleweight champion Vince Dundee (W-10, W-10) & another 10 round decision over future welterweight champion, Young Jack Thompson. Thompson, another great fighter who is forgotten today, was commonly referred to as "The greatest little black man since Joe Gans."

1929 was the beginning of Jackie's championship run ... He started on January 28th with a victory over top contender Jack McCarthy in Chicago (W-10) & quickly followed up with wins over Baby Joe Gans (W-10, February 15) & Al Van Ryan (KO-5, March 8), before winning the N.B.A. version of the welterweight title against the by now familiar Young Jack Thompson on March 25th in Chicago (W-10). Then on July 25th in Motown, Fields unified the welterweight championship against the linear titlist, Joe Dundee, in one of the strangest fights in the annals of fistiana. Jackie totally dominated the abbreviated

fight. He floored Dundee once in the first round & proceeded to bounce him off the canvass four more times in the first part of round 2. After the fifth knockdown in that round, Pal Joey, in front of 25,000 disbelieving paying customers crawled across the ring on his hands & knees until he got right in front of Jackie & sucker punched him, right in the family jewels. Jackie twisted & flopped around the ring like a gutted carp before he blacked out from the pain & was awarded the world welterweight title (W-F2). Dundee claimed he was so out of it he didn't know what he was doing ... Yeah, right. Jackie however, nailed the issue succinctly, "That bum and his buddies had bet money on the fight." Dundee knew he was a goner & he also knew if the fight ended on a foul, all bets were off.

To keep it in the family, for his first defense, Jackie took on Joe's brother Vince, yet again. The soon to be crowned middleweight champion fared even worse in this bout than he did in the previous two. Fields battered Dundee from pillar to post, knocking him down in the 6th on route to a lopsided 10 round decision.

His final fight of 1929, on December 13th in Boston was against another future middleweight title claimant Gorilla Jones (Where did they come up with these names!?) This bout was declared a no contest in the 7th round. Apparently Gorilla felt more inclined to be a lamb that night & was seemingly not capable of raising his gloves in anger. The Bean Town fight crowd, never known for their reticence in displaying their displeasure, began to jeer & shake the rafters with their stamping feet. According to reporters at ringside, Jackie was pressing the fight, but was ineffective against the hibernating Gorilla. Referee Joe O'Connor, disgusted with the lack of effort, called a halt to the miserable proceedings in the 7th & declared the fight No Contest. The shit really hit the fan in the press the next day & the State Boxing Commission withheld both fighters purses and suspended them from fighting in Massachusetts for a year. The ruling was later overturned.

On May 9 1930, in Detroit, Fields lost the welterweight title by decision to familiar rival Young Jack Thompson in 15 grueling rounds. Thompson, a superb boxer & murderous puncher fought a tough, smart battle & out dueled the clever Fields.

Jackie seriously considered retirement after this fight; but when his new manager, the infamous Jack "Doc" Kearns promised him another title shot Fields reconsidered. Subsequently, Thompson lost his title to French-Canadian strong boy Lou Brouillard. Now focused on the Canuck, they were matched on January 28 1932, in Chicago. Jackie totally outclassed Brouillard, knocking him to the canvas in the 8th en route to a 10-round title winning decision.

The way Jackie lost his title the second time was as bizarre as the way he first gained it. On February 22 1930, during his first reign as welterweight champion Jackie lost a 10 round non-title decision to Young Corbett III in San Francisco. Jackie was bitterly adamant that he had been jobbed by a hometown decision. Finally, three years to the day later, Jackie granted Corbett a rematch -- again in San Francisco. Fields and his wily manager, "Doc" Kearns, agreed to the bout San Francisco only because of the huge (by

Depression era standards), \$45,000 purse. In order to ensure that he wouldn't again be a victim of a hometown decision, Kearns insisted on well know L.A. referee Lt. Jack Kennedy. Kennedy was noted at the time for the impeccable honesty of his decisions.

Corbett, a converted southpaw and one of the all-time great counter punchers, had the best of it in the early going, but Jackie rallied strongly in the second half of the fight. Many years later Jackie told writer Peter Heller the story: "We thought we won it. Then the referee raised Corbett's hand. We were stunned. Back in the locker room, Kearns asked the referee why he gave the title to Corbett. He said he made a mistake, that he meant to raise my hand in victory, but grabbed Corbett's instead. With that, Kearns punched the referee in the mouth and knocked him cold right there in the dressing room."

Jackie who was a gallant warrior & never one to make excuses, had defended his title completely blind in one eye. The year before Fields had been in a bad car accident and he lost the sight on one eye. Fields fought only one more time -- on May 2, 1933, he beat top contender Young Peter Jackson (W-10). After this fight he was offered a title shot against middleweight champion Vince Dundee, who he had already bested three times. But the loss of the eye, coupled with the death of his beloved mother, left Jackie physically and emotionally unable to endure the rigors of the fight game and he retired. During his outstanding career Jackie faced 11 world champions: Jimmy McLarnin (KO by 2), Louis "Kid" Kaplan (L-10), Mushy Callahan (W-10), Sammy Mandell (ND-12, L-10), Vince Dundee(W-10, W-10, W-10), Joe Dundee (WF-2), Young Jack Thompson (W-10, W-10, L-15), Gorilla Jones (W-10, NC-7), Tommy Freeman (KO-5), Lou Brouillard (W-10) & Young Corbett III(L-10, L-10).

Jackie earned an estimated \$500,000 during his career which he had wisely invested in real estate. However, due to the Depression, Fields like millions of others was financially wiped out. To keep body & soul together, Jackie was forced to seek employment for the first time in his life. Always a pragmatic fellow, Jackie first landed a job as an assistant unit manager for 20th Century Fox & in the latter half of the '30's as a film editor for MGM. Until 1949, Fields sold jukeboxes for Wurlitzer; later Fields became a business representative for J&B Scotch in the mid-west. In the late 1950's Fields bought a large share of stock in the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. Although he sold his shares a few years later he remained as Public Relations Director for the hotel. Jackie also served for many years as Vice Chairman of the Nevada State Athletic Commission.

Jackie Fields died in Los Angeles on June 3, 1987 at the age of 79. Fields was a great fighter who faced everybody available during his illustrious career. This is borne out by the 11 champions that he faced. Jackie was the original L.A. "Golden Boy". Oscar De La Hoya would be well served using Jackie Fields as a role model too help guide his own career ...

Jackie Fields was elected to the Jewish Sports Hall Of Fame in Israel, in 1979.

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