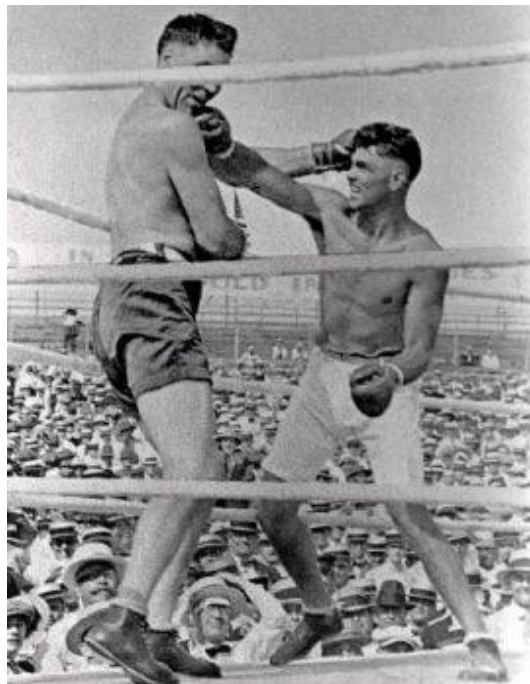


Where Are The Gloves From The Dempsey/Willard Fight? Could The King Tut's Tomb Of Boxing Be At 50th Street And Eighth Avenue?

By Bobby Franklin

One hundred years ago, on July 4, 1919, in Toledo, Ohio, Jack Dempsey won the Heavyweight Championship of the World from Jess Willard. The fight, which took place under a blazing sun, is remembered for many things. It ushered in the Dempsey era and the making of a legend. The footage of the fight, which is amazingly clear, shows Jack giving the champion a vicious beating. Though he was outweighed by nearly sixty pounds, Dempsey tore into Jess like a hungry lion. He decked Willard seven times in the first round and Jess was on the verge of being counted out when he was saved by the bell. Willard managed to stay on his feet for two more rounds and fought back gamely before retiring as the bell rang for round four.



Are These Gloves Buried In NYC?

In 1963 Jack Kearns, who had managed Dempsey at the time he won the title, wrote an article that was published in Sports Illustrated saying Jack's gloves were loaded when he fought Willard. Dempsey vehemently denied it and sued the magazine for publishing the article. They settled out of court.

There had been bad blood between Kearns and Dempsey for years, and Kearns died not long after he wrote the article. It was as if he wanted to get one last shot at the great champion before he shed his mortal coil. He certainly did that and the controversy has raged on for years. Much has been written about whether or not Dempsey went into the fight having an unfair advantage, and I am not going to rehash those arguments now. I do want to bring up another mystery that is connected to that day.

In all of the arguments over whether or not Jack's gloves were loaded that day, one thing that was never done was to examine the gloves. In fact, nobody seems to know for sure what happened to them.

Not long after the Kearns story appeared, former Bantamweight Champion Babe Herman announced that he was in possession of the gloves. He said they were given to him years earlier by a seaman, though he said he couldn't remember the man's name. He claimed the man was a close friend of Dempsey's and also a friend of his. He didn't say how the man got them and didn't offer any convincing evidence of their authenticity. Babe said that Dempsey knew he was in possession of the gloves and even suggested they be put in a glass case at his restaurant in New York.



Jack Dempsey Burying The Gloves From The Willard Fight? (Photo Courtesy Of The Great Spesh)

This doesn't add up as there is a newspaper photo that was taken on December 10, 1934 that shows Jack Dempsey placing what he claims are the gloves from the fight under the cornerstone of his soon to be built restaurant at the corner of 50th Street and Eight Avenue in New York City. This was directly across from the old Madison Square Garden. In the photo he is accompanied by his wife Hannah and Mayor LaGuardia along with a number of other people. Did Jack forget about this when he was talking with Herman, if indeed such a conversation actually took place.

One of the reasons for examining the gloves would have been to see if there were traces of plaster of Paris in them. Kearns claimed

he soaked Dempsey's taped hands in the substance before the fight. That claim has been pretty much debunked, but checking the gloves would completely rule out that possibility.

Of course, the gloves in the photo very well may not have been the ones Jack wore that hot July 4th afternoon. It is possible they were just an old pair of boxing gloves and the whole thing was staged for publicity for Jack's new restaurant. It does seem odd he would bury the gloves rather than put them on display. Perhaps he was getting rid of the evidence, though that wouldn't have added up since this was almost thirty years before Kearns wrote the story that got things stirred up.

Still, it would be interesting to uncover the gloves. Jack eventually moved the popular restaurant to between 49th and 50th Streets. It doesn't appear the gloves went along for the ride.

Could they still be buried at that location? It's very likely. Are they the gloves Jack wore when he beat Willard? I doubt it, but it is possible. There is only one way to find out. Recovering them would be one of the great finds in the archeology of boxing. I say an archeological dig should be ordered for the site. It is time to recover this rare artifact from the reign of one of the greatest kings in the history of boxing. Can you dig it?

Bobby Franklin's Boxing over Broadway

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