

1910

The Final Fights of Young Ziringer



By: Vincent T. Ciaramella

September 2, 1910

...and when the bonesetter fixes me up I'm going into things for this little kid of mine. Watch me save my money for her.

- Fred "Young" Ziringer

These were the final words spoken by Young Ziringer to a friend, Jimmy Sandow, as they sat on the steps of Ziringer's home at 929 Main St, in Pittsburgh's North Side. Little did either of them know

that the boxer would be dead just hours later. So, what happened? How did a man at the age of 22, in the prime of his life die so suddenly? It is perhaps one of the most bizarre deaths in all of boxing history, if not *THE*. It was a fatal mistake made in the dark by a man with stomach cramps.

Who was Young Ziringer?

Though largely forgotten today, Young Ziringer was a notable name in the Pittsburgh boxing scene and surrounding area at the beginning of the twentieth century. From 1904 through 1910, he was heavily featured in the sports sections as one of Pittsburgh's top bantamweights. His feud with Patsy Brannigan, a boxer from the Woods Run neighborhood of Pittsburgh, was a huge draw on any fight card. According to Pittsburgh boxing historian, Douglas Cavanaugh the phrase, "*Who's better, Patsy or Dutch was the common refrain in Pgh back then.*"

Born in June of 1888 to first generation German parents in what was called "Deushtown," a nickname for old Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh's North Side), Frederick G. Ziringer Jr. came into a world where the mills or the mines were the final destination for those unlucky souls born into poor working-class families. His father, Frederick Sr, is listed as a "cigar maker" in the 1880 census and later a "day laborer" in 1900. These jobs paid little and had little future in them. One way to escape the cycle of poverty was to put on the gloves and make a name for yourself in the squared circle. And that's just what Young Ziringer did starting at the age of 15. From 1904 onward, "Dutch" as he was sometimes called (a colloquial nickname for people of German heritage because of the proximity in sound to the German word *Deutsch*,) mixed it up with the likes of Patsy Brannigan, whom he would fight 18 times. He also slugged it out with greats like Phil McGovern and Johnny Coulon. In fact, it was the bout with Coulon that Ziringer injured his shoulder in the fifth round on October 22, 1909 at the Duquesne Gardens. That injury would plague him for the rest of his career.

February 1910

The beginning of the year started out with a possible bout with Jimmy Walsh. Though that fight never materialized, Ziringer took on Marty "Kid" Sullivan of Homestead, PA at Keaggy Rink in Greensburg, PA on February 2. The fight was scheduled for 15 rounds with both fighters to weigh in at 116 the night of the match. Special trains were set to run from Pittsburgh to Greensburg out of Union Station to bring fight fans to the scene of the dust up. Sullivan and Ziringer gave it their all, going the full 15 to a draw. In the fifth, Sullivan landed one on Ziringer's jaw and sent the little man down to the mat for a four count. Ziringer bombarded Sullivan with lefts the remainder of the night but they didn't have the power to send him to dreamland. This would be the first of only four bouts left in Ziringer's career.

Just eight days later, on February 10, Ziringer was thrown from a car and taken to a hospital with an injury to his spine. The papers report that he and some friends were out for a joy ride, when the taxicab they were in overturned on a steep hill near the Donegal Inn in the West View neighborhood of Pittsburgh, hurling them to the ground with great force. The papers report that the other occupants walked away from the crash with only minor injuries, while the little pugilist received the worst of it. Was this a premonition of things to come?

On February 20, it was announced that on March 2, Ziringer and his rival Patsy Brannigan would meet at the newly reopened large auditorium at the Duquesne Gardens. This would be a six-round bout presented by the National Club (also referred to as the National Sports Club), refereed by Buck Cornelius to settle once and for all, who was the better man.



March 1910

March 2, the night of the fight arrived. The papers had been building up the tussle between the two diminutive pugs. Fans were hoping the question of who was the better man would be settled that night. Unfortunately, six rounds proved too short and resulted in a draw. Sports writers and fans alike were disappointed. The papers give various accounts of what happened, but the consensus was that the

first round was even with rounds two through four going to Ziringer. Brannigan made a comeback in rounds five and six. One paper reported that the two mitt slingers went all out at the end of the fourth, slugging each other even after the bell rang. They had to be separated by their seconds and taken back to their respective corners.

Rumors began to circulate on March 4 about a 15-round fight in Greensburg between the two rivals, but that turned out to be just a rumor. Though writers and fans agreed that the two needed a longer fight to settle once and for all, who was the best in their weight class.

Jim Jab, the alias of Dr. Alfred R. Cratty, a doctor in the red-light district of Pittsburgh, had a boxing column in the local papers where he gave his opinions and slung mud all over the names of fighters with little or no evidence to back it up. As historian Douglas Cavanaugh put it, "*Cratty was heavy on accusation, short on facts to back it.*" On March 8, he ran a story in which he accused Ziringer of going on an all-night bender after the Brannigan fight and getting beat up. As he put it; "*Dutch had a battered up face.*" And then went on to explain that it wasn't the result of Patsy's fists. Jab even went as far as to say that this was the reason he showed so poorly in his next bout against Mike Malone.

On March 10, Malone and Ziringer met at Duquesne Gardens. One paper reported that Ziringer entered the ring wearing a bandage over his shoulder. Though the exact reason is lost to time, it was most likely a combination of the old injury sustained in 1909 during the Coulon fight along with the more recent bout with Brannigan. Regardless, the injury would prove to be Ziringer's undoing. The sources have variations on just what happened, but it seems that Ziringer's shoulder became dislocated and it was either the police or the referee that stopped the fight in the fourth round. One paper says it was Malone who notified the ref of his opponent's injury, thus showing true sportsmanship. Others were not so kind and accused Ziringer of faking an injury to get out of a beating he was taking at the hands of Malone. What really happened, we'll never know for sure. But writers like Jim Jab said that Ziringer's stock had fallen in the eyes of fight fans of the Smoky City.

May 1910

The month of April was quiet for the little boxer as he recuperated from his injury. Then on May 6, it was announced that Ziringer and Brannigan were going to fight 15 rounds at the St. Clair Theater in Greensburg, PA. This was what the fans had been waiting for. A special ten car train would take fans out of Union Station to see this historic contest. Both Brannigan and Ziringer trained hard for this one. Each day leading up to the fight, the papers chummed the waters, working the sports into a frenzy. Whose hand would be held high on May 16? What man would walk out with his tail between his legs? Camp Brannigan and Camp Ziringer were ready for war!

The fight at the St. Clair Theater would be the last fight of Ziringer's career and it didn't end on a high note. The two came out swinging, trying to land a haymaker. Brannigan did most of the leading and according to the papers, landed the most punches. Ziringer countered with his own hits but by the fourth, the blows to his head were having a toll on his performance. Ziringer returned to his corner in the fourth distressed and losing. By the middle of the fifth he was hanging on the ropes, his shoulder dislocated, and unable to defend himself. The fight was over and so was his career.

In the days that followed, Brannigan fans accused the German of faking the injury because he was taking a thrashing at the hands of the little Celt. What was the real reason? Again, we will never know. What we do know is that misfortune wasn't done with him.

July 1910

Pittsburgh is home to three rivers, the Monongahela, the Allegheny, and the Ohio. These rivers were and are major highways for commercial traffic as well as for locals going up or down to their respected destinations. They have dams and locks to ferry the barges loaded with coal up and down the rivers and to regulate the water levels. On July 10, Ziringer and two companions almost drowned when their boat missed the lock and headed straight for Dam #2 near Aspinwall, PA. They tried to put the motorboat in reverse, but it was too late. They had a one-way ticket over the falls and to their deaths. Strangely, or luckily for them, the bow of the boat got wedged in the dam and they didn't spill over into the churning waters below. However, for the next twenty minutes they clung to the sides of the craft and shouted for help. By the time help arrived, the men were almost unconscious. This was the second time the little German cheated death that year and sadly, it would be his last.



September 3, 1910, midnight

In an era of gaslight, one had to light the lamp in order to see. This was just how things were. If you went into a room that was dark, you lit the gaslight in order to illuminate the area. Common sense for the time. Well, on that fateful night, Fredrick Ziringer didn't light the lamp.

The papers go into great detail about just what happened. It seems that while in his bed at 929 Main St, he started having stomach cramps around midnight. Acting on the advice of his wife, he went next door to his parent's house at 927 Main St and went to the cupboard in the bathroom where they had some peppermint, which was used to soothe upset stomachs and relieve cramps. He reached in, grabbed what he thought was peppermint and swallowed. It only took seconds to realize he had made a fatal mistake. Because it was dark, he didn't notice that it was carbolic acid that he drank. A common household disinfectant found in many homes in the early twentieth century, carbolic acid was also used quite frequently to commit suicide during that time period. While it seems that it was an accident, we will never know for sure if it was an attempt to end his own life that he immediately regretted or just plain bad luck. Regardless, he immediately roused his sister and parents from their beds. They sent for a doctor, and thus began the final fight for Young Ziringer, though this time the stakes were much higher than bragging rights or even a title, it was a fight for his life. For two hours his wife, sister, and parents tried to induce vomiting with cup after cup of eggs, flour, and milk but to no avail. The little boxer lay on the floor dead for two hours before the doctor arrived at 4 AM. Strangely, just three days later Katherine Haney of 1100 Linden St in the Northside died the exact same way as Ziringer. Was it just a coincidence? Were the bottles of peppermint and carbolic acid so similar that one might mistake one for the other? Or was it a case of two individuals that tried and succeeded in ending their own lives? We will never know. His funeral was attended by many with boxers Buck Crouse and Patsy Brannigan acting as two of the pallbearers. He was buried in St. Weiterhausen Cemetery (now known as St. Paul's) in Reserve Township, just outside the city of Pittsburgh where he lies today.



Special thanks goes out to Douglas Cavanaugh for the quotes and research help. His book: *Pittsburgh Boxing: A Pictorial History* details the lives and careers of the boxers and writers detailed in this article.

Vincent T. Ciaramella is a psychology teacher and author of *Jack McClelland: The Pride of Pittsburg*. He is also the great-great grandson of McClelland who was inducted into the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame as part of the 2020 class. Pictured with the author is his son, Enzo, at the grave of Young Ziringer.