

## FIGHTS WE CAN'T FORGET

# THE CLOWN AND THE UNSINKABLE WELSHMAN



Tommy (left) had a personal feud going with Maxie but managed a thin smile for photographers as Baer hammed it up at the weigh-in.

**A battered Tommy Farr summed it up best of all when he said, "I happened to catch Max Baer on the best night he ever had."**

PRACTICALLY EVERYONE in the overflow crowd (18,222) remembered how Max Baer took the fatal 10-count in the Joe Louis fight 2½ years before. They'd never forget how Max, squatting in a kneeling position and apparently in full possession of his senses, listened to referee Arthur Donovan count him out without as much as making an attempt to get up. They'd jeered him and cursed him that night, called him a "quitter." Baer himself never convincingly denied the accusation.

But now, despite that sour memory, they were up on their feet cheering frantically for Maxie as he strode proudly down the aisle in Madison Square Garden, about to make his first New York appearance since the Louis disaster. There is no explanation for this turn-about of public opinion, except to say that it is part of the Baer legend.

No fighter in all history was as beloved as Maxie. Perhaps it was because nobody ever considered him anything but an overgrown kid who lived to have fun and play the part of the clown.

Nobody bothered to look over at the other aisle, where a hard-looking man with a cauliflower ear and a mop of reddish-blond hair moved slowly toward the ring. He must have felt all alone as the great hall rang with frantic shouts of "Atta boy, Max!" . . . "We'll show 'em, Maxie baby!"

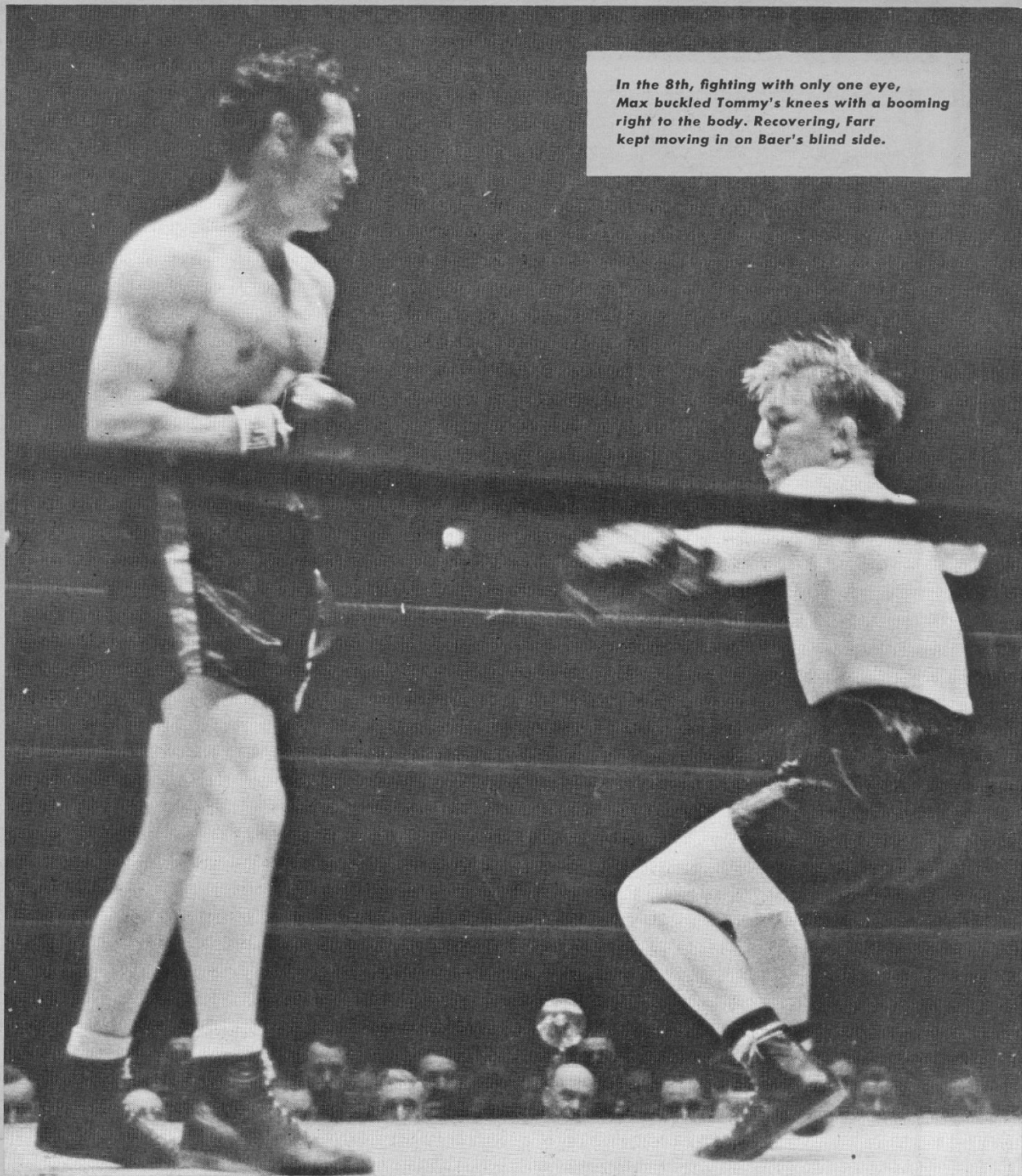
But Tommy Farr of Cardiff, Wales, never paid any attention to cheers. He was a true professional who knew his trade well and exchanged his peculiar talents for financial gain. Every American had come to respect him for the superhuman display of courage and durability he'd exhibited the year before against that frightfully destructive machine called Joe Louis. Farr made Joe settle for a surprisingly close decision victory in the champion's first title defense. And, most important of all, Louis was not once, in the entire 15 rounds, able to knock tough Tom off his sturdy pins.

The odds of 7-5 in favor of Farr over Baer seemed a sympathetic gesture toward Max. They should have been much higher when you consider that, only eleven months before, Tommy had given Maxie a good going-over in London while romping to a decision.

Now, it was the night of March 11, 1938, and Baer, followed closely by manager Ancil Hoffman and chief second Izzy Klein, eased his Adonis-like body through the ropes, straightening up to his full 6'2½", broke into that magical smile of his and began throwing kisses in all directions. After circling the compass four times, he blew a kiss at Farr, who was sitting dourly in his corner while a second threaded the laces through his gloves.

The crowd was delirious. Men roared with laughter and the women—they were always there in force whenever Max Baer was on the program—sighed and swooned as Izzy Klein helped Max shrug off his robe, exposing that fabulous body . . . which Baer promptly flowered into full bloom by sucking in a massive breath and flexing his rippling muscles.

Famed boxing reporter Hype Igoe turned to the writer sitting next to him and said with a grin, "Look at that. Not a punch has been thrown and that big clown has them jumping all over the place. Remarkable!"



*In the 8th, fighting with only one eye, Max buckled Tommy's knees with a booming right to the body. Recovering, Farr kept moving in on Baer's blind side.*

Indeed it was remarkable. No fighter in all history could cast a spell over an audience like Max Baer . . . and without a single punch!

As Max continued his act, taking all the time he wanted, the thick, scarred brows of Tommy Farr started to lift. He couldn't resist stealing a peek at the Clown Prince. But the coldly serious Welshman saw nothing amusing. Like any real professional, he resented anyone making a mockery of his trade—a brutal trade which demanded dedi-

cated men, not clowns. Besides, Farr and Baer had a personal feud brewing between them which had nothing to do with the pre-fight ballyhoo. It began, actually, at Farr's training camp in Long Branch, New Jersey, when Tommy was preparing for the Louis fight.

One hot July afternoon, Baer pulled up to the camp in a cherry-red roadster, and immediately everybody forgot about Farr, who happened to be in the ring at the time, waiting to begin his spar-

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You had to hand it to Tommy. Bouncing up from two knock-downs (Joe Louis had not been able to floor him once), Farr concentrated his fury on Max's left eye, finally closed it . . .

ring sessions. Breaking into a snappy gait, Baer moved toward the ring, to the applause of the spectators, stopping every few feet to sign an outstretched autograph book or scrap of paper shoved at him by some infatuated female. Then he stepped into the ring, went through his kiss-blowing routine and strode toward Farr (who, by this time, was burning) and extended his hand. Tommy turned his back, leaving the astonished Maxie wondering what to do with his big mitt. This had never happened to him before.

"You've got a crust coming here after all those things you said about me," Farr snapped.

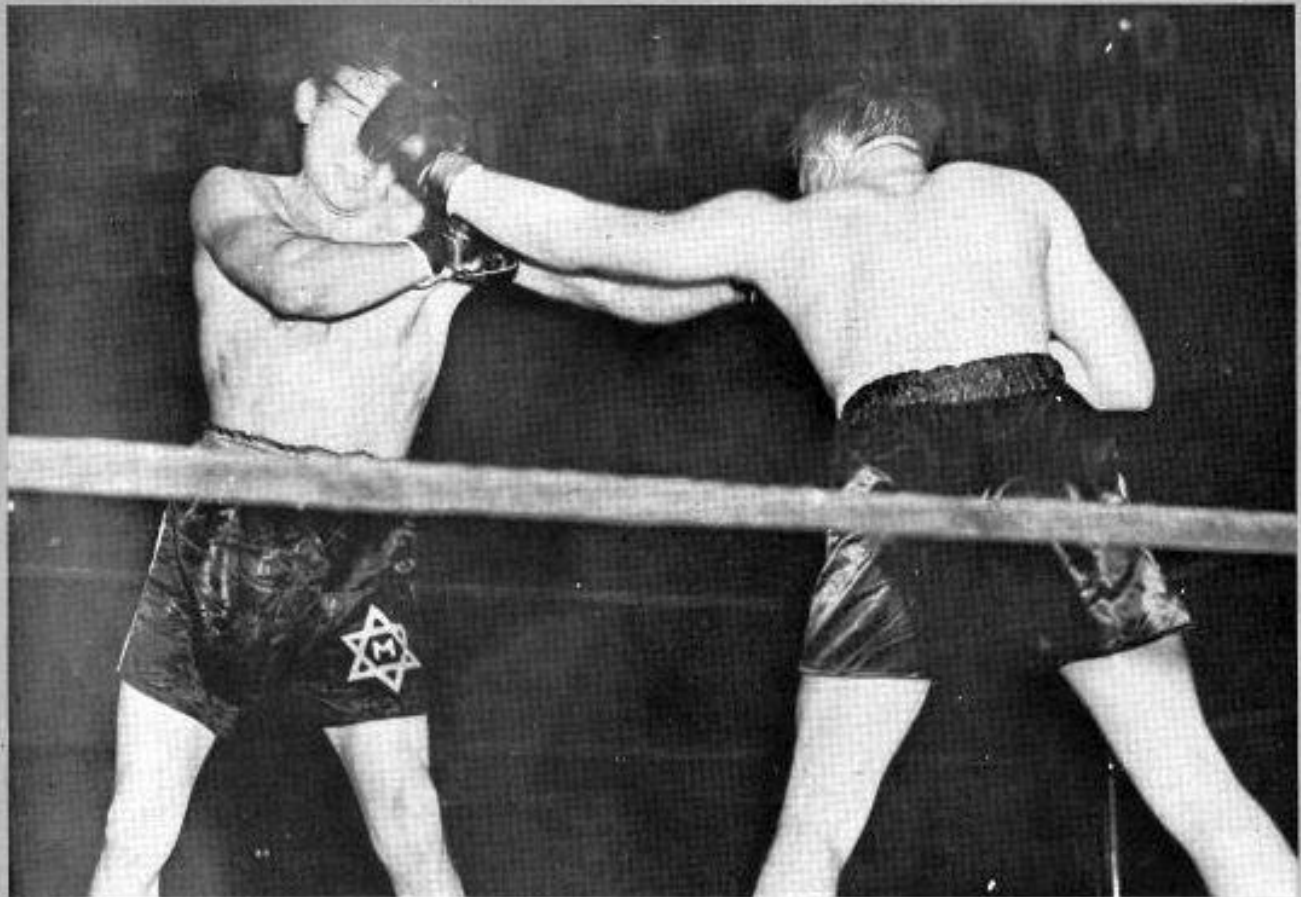
Baer grinned. "Don't believe everything you read in the papers, boy," he said.

The word "boy" inflamed Farr. He pushed Baer and for a moment it looked as if they would come to blows. But seconds and handlers stepped in just in time.

Max couldn't pass up an opportunity to hog the spotlight. Throwing up his hands, he shouted: "Wanta see a fight?" "Yes!" the spectators yelled. But Max calmed them down. Then, with a shrug, he said: "But if I hit him now, Mike Jacobs wouldn't have any fight Thursday night . . ."

As he left the ring, more autograph hunters swarmed around him. Baer signed his name with a flourish, tossing out cracks like:

"I hold a first mortgage on that heavyweight



. . . But Baer (left) took everything Tommy threw at him and, fighting like the Magnificent Maxie of old, slashed and battered the courageous Welshman. Then, in the 14th, he electrified the crowd by dropping Tommy a third time with a right to the jaw.

title and I'm going to foreclose soon. I'll take care of Braddock, knock out (Max) Schmeling again and then they can bring on Louis."

The experts laughed at this. "Baer," they said, "is just whistling in the dark. If he ever saw Louis again, he'd run the hundred yard dash in five seconds flat."

And after Tommy lasted 15 rounds with the dreaded Brown Bomber, the experts laughed even harder. Said one, "I can't wait to see what Farr will do to Baer next time they meet." Neither could Tommy.

When Farr leaped out of his corner at the opening bell to begin his second bout with Baer, he quickly discovered that this was not the same fighter he'd licked in London. Maxie's jabs seemed much harder, and there was no eternal grin on his face. In fact, he looked downright mean as he whipped over his first round-house punch, the punch that had won him the title from Primo Carnera in 1934. True, that first round-house missed by a couple of feet, but then Baer had always missed a dozen before he landed one.

Farr was smart enough to respect Maxie's right. You had to do that or you were dead. Shrewd Izzy Klein, who'd trained Baer for the fight, anticipated this, had made Max concentrate on his left all through training. "The right we got," Izzy had said. "Like money in the bank. If we get a chance to use it, great. But he can't watch both our hands . . . so we'll fool him with the left."

Klein's strategy proved brilliant. Max Baer had always been considered strictly a one-handed fighter. He could neither jab nor hook with his left. Cut off his left arm, and you'd still have the same Max Baer.

The assumption was completely false, as Farr soon learned. In the second round, Max fainted a right to Tommy's head and, fast as a bullet, ripped in a left hook just under the heart.

That punch did something Joe Louis could not do in 15 rounds—it dropped Farr. And as Tommy went down, 18,222 people went up as if launched by a rocket. They were in a frenzy, screamingly happy. Maxie was gonna come through! Hallelujah! "And with a left hook!"

But nobody knocks out Tommy Farr with one punch . . . or two, or three. Like we said, this man was a real pro. Tough and doggedly proud. He got up, and he didn't try to crawl into a hole to protect himself. He ploughed into Baer, who really hadn't yet finished taking his bows for that startling knockdown. Farr hit him smack in the eye with a booming right, then cracked him on the nose with a couple of lefts.

The crowd sat down abruptly. Max pulled up his trunks, which is a dead giveaway that a fighter is either confused or tired, and missed a left hook—range: three inches. The bell rang, ending the second round. Max smiled and patted Farr on top of his head like a little boy. Tommy sneered and said something. We can't print it.

In the third, Baer did it again. This time with a right. Tommy took a 6-count. But when he got up, he held on. You knew he was hurt because



Grinning through his cuts and bruises, Maxie clasps his hands in delight after unanimous victory. Then he clowned with ringsiders, as he had done throughout the fight.

Farr hated to hold on. Although everybody was thinking about Maxie—and only Maxie—the objective people in the audience stopped long enough between adulations to the "Great Man" to cast a cheer in the direction of lion-hearted courage. You can write a million words trying to describe the murderous power in Max Baer's fists, but the only way you could possibly understand what one of his bombs could do would be to have taken one on the chin yourself.

Take our word for it, Farr was a helluva man to pull himself upright—not once, but twice!

This was one of the rare bouts during which Baer heeded the advice of a trainer, tried his best to do what Izzy Klein whispered in his ear during each rest period. Klein was pacing him—making him conserve his strength for the later rounds. And the beautiful part of it was that Max didn't

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Maxie wears his shiner like a badge of honor in dressing room. The wound almost cost him the fight until his chief second Izzy Klein lanced it and sucked out the clotted blood.

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# BAER-FARR

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give the impression that he was stalling. He'd flurry, then ease into a clinch or jockey Farr into the ropes. And Max always made sure that he was leaning on Tommy, not the other way around. After all, he was 29 years old, and this was a 15-round fight . . . or so trainer Klein had drilled into his head.

Farr found Baer's long reach a difficult problem, seemed to be getting more and more frustrated as the rounds slipped by. And when Max discovered that he could make the crowd laugh by extending his left full-length into his smaller foe's nose, he drove Farr into a frenzy by doing it repeatedly.

Then, to pour more coal on an already blazing fire, Maxie religiously patted Tommy on top of the head after each round. He also got a burst of applause when he finished most of the rounds in his corner—a trick he borrowed from that old master, Tommy Loughran—making Farr walk clear across the ring for his precious minute's rest. Maybe all this was part of the Baer magic; he made people laugh in between thrills. But there always had to be a foil. And this night the unwilling "straight man" was Tommy Farr, who had come only to fight.

In the 6th round, the swelling under Baer's left eye increased. And in the 7th, it became a source of deep concern to Izzy Klein who slapped an ice pack over it between rounds. It didn't help . . . and Farr was quick to recognize his sudden advantage. From then on, that horrible-looking blue mass which obliterated Maxie's eye became his prime—if not only—target. Zip, zip, zip—Tommy's fast jabs zeroed in. And he began circling to Baer's left, where Max couldn't see him. Tommy was playing it smart, and the crowd was worried. Referee Arthur Donovan kept peering at the spot where Baer's eye used to be, looked concerned, never stopped studying Maxie's face.

Baer had to swivel his head all the way to the left to see Farr, but Tommy's jabs had already landed before the one-eyed fighter even realized they'd been launched.

Of course Baer wasn't just standing there catching all this time. He was letting go just as many punches as Farr, but few were landing. Still, when one did connect, Tommy was forced to retreat to catch his breath. One Baer right in the 8th round landed with a booming thud to the body and Farr's knees buckled. But Tommy kept spinning to Baer's left—always to the left—and though Max knew where his tormentor was, he couldn't see him, couldn't follow up. If you want a better idea of what Max was up against, cover your left eye completely and picture a man moving quickly to your blind side, throwing punches at you. It will seem pretty hopeless.

After each round, referee Donovan walked over

to Baer's corner for a closer look at the eye. At the end of the 11th, Donovan said he would stop the fight "if that swelling isn't brought down." Izzy Klein tried to con him, but Donovan was the best referee in the business, knew all the tricks. This man didn't take con.

By the time the 12th round was over, Baer's eye looked like a purple balloon. Something had to be done immediately . . . and Klein did it. It was a drastic step, common in the old bare-knuckle days. You make an incision in the center of the swelling, then, with your mouth, suck out the clotted blood that is causing the swelling. If you have a leech handy, it could do a better job. But Izzy Klein had no leech. He used his mouth and although the eye was still tightly shut, it didn't look nearly as bad as before and Donovan was able to live with it.

The "operation" encouraged Baer. He surged back in the last three rounds with a remarkable display of power. The pacing that had been master-minded by Klein was paying off, and it was Farr, not Baer, who appeared to be wilting. In the 14th, Baer electrified the crowd by dropping the gallant Welshman for a third time with a right to the jaw. Some ringsiders contended that Tommy had been off balance, that it should not have been called a legitimate knockdown. But in the eyes of the crowd, their wonderful clown had done it again, which *proved* he was a harder hitter than Joe Louis—*three* times as hard.

And now it was all over. Baer grinned through the bruises and cuts, grabbed Farr in a headlock and hugged him. Tommy didn't hug back. He broke the headlock by slipping his sweating head free. Then he walked, head down, to his corner.

When Baer was awarded the unanimous decision, Farr, pro that he was, went over to congratulate him. The crowd gave the Welsh warrior a well-deserved ovation as he left the ring.

But Maxie didn't want to leave. He began that kiss-throwing jazz again, stopping now and then to lean into the press row to shake a friend's hand. He also picked out the writers who'd been knocking his brains out in their columns and chided them good-naturedly.

Two preliminary fighters were now in the ring for the final bout of the evening . . . and Max *still* wanted to stay around. He squared off with one of the young fighters, who weighed 70 pounds less than he did, swatted the kid lightly on the backside, then kissed the astonished lad's cheek. The crowd was still there—few had made for the exits. Nobody wanted to miss Maxie-the-Clown's post-fight show. And how they loved it! How they loved him! If the police hadn't finally asked him to leave the ring, he might stayed there till the following morning. And the ever-lovin' crowd would have stayed right there with him.

But there was no joy in Tommy Farr's dressing room. The beaten fighter, wearing lumps under each eye, cut reporters off with one to-the-point observation: "I just happened to catch Max Baer on the best night he ever had."

Nobody doubted him. ■