

HERMAN TAYLOR---PHILADELPHIA'S GREATEST BOXING PROMOTER

Nobody ever loved the fight game more than Herman Taylor. Probably no one was ever actively involved in boxing longer than Herman Taylor. When he died on June 27, 1980 at the age of 93 he had put in fully 79 years as a participant in the sport, maintaining his office and conducting business still looking to promote another show until about a week before he passed away. This man literally worked his way up from the very bottom of his chosen profession, paying his dues, to being eventually recognized as truly one of the greatest promoters of all time.

He was born in 1887 and raised in the neighborhood around 6th and Catharine. By 1901, Taylor being the sole support of his mother and a younger brother and sister, convinced Jack McGuigan, promoter of the famed National A.C. located at 11th and Catharine, to give him a job. Starting as a floor sweeper, young Taylor was to serve an apprenticeship that dealt with every conceivable aspect of the game as a father-son relationship was quickly established with McGuigan.

He was soon driving a horse drawn cart through the cobbled streets of Philadelphia advertising the latest boxing show at the National while clanging a huge cow bell and pointing to the fight posters that adorned the sides of the wagon.

By 1912, with the blessing of McGuigan, he was ready to promote his own shows and purchased the old Broadway A.C. at 15th and Washington from Diamond Lew Bailey. Taylor's resume at this time already included being a matchmaker, he had also managed a small stable of fighters, and had himself boxed on some shows when a substitute was needed in ^{preliminary} ~~preliminary~~ bouts.

Taylor was an immediate success as a promoter and by 1916 formed a partnership with Bobby Gunnis, staging outdoor shows at Shibe Park. These open-air, all star cards became famous nationally, importing the world's best fighters, along with top local boxers, to perform for appreciative Philadelphia audiences.

A typical show might have Harry Greb, Sam Langford, Jack Britton, Johnny Dundee, and Lew Tendler in separate bouts making the evening a true extravaganza for the fans and leaving them hungry for more. The "boy promoters" as they were dubbed, also presented their famous "Battle of the Champions" which featured lightweight ruler Benny Leonard kayoing featherweight titlist Johnny Kilbane before a huge crowd.

The pair soon branched out and were running cards at the Arena, the Baker Bowl, Municipal Stadium and later Convention Hall, Camden, Atlantic City, Newark and Nutley New Jersey, using the same successful formula of presenting the fans high quality attractions at popular prices.

Although Tex Rickard is given the credit for promoting the legendary Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney ^{MATCH} on September 23, 1926, in front of 120 thousand patrons at Sequicentennial (Municipal) Stadium, it was Taylor and Gunnis who did most of the leg work for that affair and they split up a hundred grand between themselves for their efforts.

As time went on they continued giving the fans a steady diet of great matches including Benny Bass' sensational knockout of Harry Blitman for Philadelphia bragging rights in 1928 with receipts reaching the hundred thousand dollar mark. In 1930 the highly controversial victory, on deliberate foul, of Primo Carnera over George Godfrey at Baker Bowl with 35,000 witnesses paying \$180,175. Fifteen thousand Convention Hall clients watched as Max Schmelling was given a surprising set back by former Penn State football star Steve Hamas in another highly anticipated encounter in 1934.

Over forty thousand fans watched the last Taylor - Gunnis presentation on Sept. 22, 1936 when Joe Louis finally knocked out the courageous Al Ettore in the fifth round at Municipal Stadium. Tragically Bobby Gunnis right before the bout had a heart attack and died. (It was widely rumored that Taylor paid Mrs. Gunnis her husband's share of promotional profits years after his death).

Of course these bouts were just some of the highlights of their regularly successful shows featuring the likes of Mickey Walker, Jack Sharkey, Barney Ross, Tony Canzoneri, Babe Risko, Joe and Vince Dundee, Sammy Mandell, Luis Firpo, Kid Chocolate, Pancho Villa, Jimmy Wilde, Joe Lynch and Maxie Rosenbloom. In fact they presented almost every major champion and contender of that exciting era, along with such local stars as Tommy Loughran, Lew Tandler, Benny Bass, Battling Levinsky, Patsy Wallace, Matt Adgie, Midget Wolgast, Lew Massey, Johnny Jadick, Eddie Cool, etc., etc...

Taylor continued on solo, running a very profitable operation. For many years being second only to Mike Jacobs' New York outfit. In fact he was always challenging his "old friend" when Jacobs monopoly threatened to freeze-out most of the independent boxers and promoters.

When Tony Galento's ornery and belligerent manner made him unwanted by the powerful New York commission, and by Jacobs' also (who considered Galento too big a risk for Joe Louis). Taylor signed Tony to an exclusive 5 year contract building him into the foremost heavyweight challenger and such a huge attraction that Jacobs had to relent and allow champion Louis to meet Galento in a sensational title match, and regretfully had to cut Taylor in on the promotion as well. A few years later Sugar Ray Robinson signed an "exclusive" contract with Taylor to promote Ray's Philly bouts and provide him with a trump card when negotiating with Jacobs for important matches.

During the war years Taylor's business was booming and he promoted such title matches ^{as} Joe Louis-Gus Dorazio, Lou Salica vs. Tommy Forte, along with the Bob Montgomery ^{-MIKE WILLIAMS} feud which raged in the city for three years and two classic and highly profitable battles. Many local boxers reached international stardom under Taylor's direction in the ensuing years from Montgomery, Dorazio, Wesley Mouzon, Billy Fox, Billy Arnold, Harold Johnson, Gil Turner, Percy Bassett, Joey Giardello, Georgie Benton, Len Matthews, Sugar Hart to Joe Frazier, Gypsy Joe Harris, Bennie Briscoe, Kitten Hayward and Leotis Martin.

Herman Taylor's ^{Greatest} accomplishment came during the summer of 1952 when he staged three world title fights at Municipal Stadium. In June, Jersey, ^{JOE WALCOTT} successfully defended his heavyweight title against bitter rival Ezzard Charles with 21,599 on hand. Kid Gavilan outlasting Gil Turner in a vicious war drawing a record gate for the welterweight class and 39,025 paid guests. And of course the epic struggle between Marciano and Walcott that Taylor simply called "the greatest heavyweight match I ever looked at."

On Herman Taylor's 76th birthday in an article by Nat Frank, Taylor was asked if he would live the same life if he had it to do all over again. His answer probably best summed up his life. "And why not, he said, It has given me fame and fortune; has brought me in contact with the worlds foremost citizens; and enabled me to do numerous fistic presentations for the most worthy of benefits, whereby the City, State and Nation benefitted."

When asked if he ever considered retirement at his advanced age, he replied "on the contrary, it has given me added ambition to continue in the game I love."

CHUCK HASSON