

IN QUEST OF OTTO VON PORAT

Some 30 or so years ago, I was doing a monthly article on boxing for a local magazine and decided to write about a boyhood ring hero of mine- OTTO von PORAT.

I didn't know too much, then, about von Porat, so I arranged an interview with his Chicago manager and fellow Norwegian, Ed Stevenson; so I could find out all about Otto. I traveled to 61st and Western, on Chicago's south side, where Stevenson had his plumbing supply business, to talk with him about von Porat.

I had studied von Porat's fight record, and I recalled reading about some of his more prominent Chicago fights; but I was puzzled about some of Otto's defeats, and was hoping I could learn the reason for them. Stevenson was very helpful and I enjoyed his telling me about his experiences managing von Porat.

I wrote my story, but before it ever saw print, the magazine I wrote it for went out of business. And so, my article on Otto von Porat went out of business, too. I never took the time to submit my article to another magazine, and, in fact, I put the article away and forgot it- until about two years ago.

In reviewing some of my files, I ran across the article and re-read it. Not too bad, I said to myself. But I then asked myself a few questions:

1. what happened to Otto von Porat?
2. is he still living?
3. if so, where?

~~I decided then that I really didn't know anything about my hero, Otto von Porat, either the boxer or the man.~~

I decided then, that I really didn't know anything about my hero Otto von Porat, either the boxer or the man, so I've spent the last two years searching for Otto von Porat. And I'd like to share with you the results of my search.

Take one tall descendant of Norwegian and Swedish ancestors; add a devastating right hand punch; mix with the following ingredients: "The Hard Rock From Down Under", "The Basque Woodchopper", "The Cleveland Rubber Man" and "The King of the Cane-Brakes". Stir these with the roar of thousands of screaming fight fans and add a further symbolic ingredient- the years of the roaring twenties and the early thirties.

The result- one of the most fascinating heavyweight boxers of all time.

Otto von Porat was the descendant of Norwegian and Swedish ancestors with the pulverizing right hand.

"The Hard Rock From Down Under" was Tom Heene<sup>y</sup>, <sup>of New Zealand,</sup> who once fought for the heavyweight championship of the world.

"The Basque Woodchopper" was Paulino Uzcudun, of Spain, who fought four heavyweight champions.

"The Cleveland Rubber Man" was Johnny Risko, of Cleveland, called the "Rubber Man" because he always bounced back when he got hit.

"The King of the Cane-Brakes" was Young Stribling, who had over 300 fights and fought in every tank town and city in the country, as well as in Europe, South Africa and Australia.

All of these fighters were von Porat opponents and each one played a significant role in Otto von Porat's life and career.

The thousands of screaming fight fans were primarily those of two cities, Chicago and Minneapolis, both with large concentrations of Scandinavians, who were also fight fans; but also included screaming fight fans in Grand Rapids, Peoria, Davenport, Boston and New York. All of these fight bugs flocked to see Otto von Porat in action, jamming arenas in every city whenever he appeared.

Otto von Porat was a major character on the American boxing scene for a period of eight years, from 1926 thru 1933; during which time he fought some of the greatest heavyweights of his era.

He was a striking figure of a man, this von Porat. Six feet, four inches; 195 pounds; handsome; personable; with blue, blue eyes reflecting the ice and snow of his native Norway; and curly brown hair. In addition, von Porat was, unlike most of his ring counterparts, an educated man who spoke five languages.

Von Porat was born in Stockholm in 1903, of a Swedish father and a Norwegian mother. On his father's side, von Porat's ancestors went back to the time of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. His father was a military attache, whose duties saw him travel widely. In Chicago, the elder von Porat met Otto's mother, who was living here.

Otto's mother could trace her Norwegian ancestry back to the fifteenth century. Shortly after their meeting the couple were married and moved to Stockholm, where Otto was born. The family lived in Sweden and Denmark, before taking up permanent residence in Oslo, Norway.

In 1920, in Antwerp, the Olympic boxers representing Norway had won one silver medal. The 1924 Olympics were in Paris and Otto tried out for Norway's team, succeeding in winning a place as his country's heavyweight member.

Von Porat captured the highest Olympic honor, a coveted gold medal, as he defeated four opponents, to become 1924 Olympic heavyweight champion. Otto knocked out foes from Australia and Italy, and decisioned men from Argentina and Denmark. The gold medal won in 1924 by Otto von Porat, is the only boxing gold medal ever won by Norway.

Boxing was at a low ebb in the Scandinavian countries in the years of the middle 1920's, and Europe was occupied with trying to recover from the devastation and upheaval of the first World War. Consequently, European boxers of any talent whatsoever traveled to America in search of the wealth and opportunity that was not available to them in their own lands.

Von Porat was no exception and, after corresponding with former boxer George De Bray of Chicago, now a manager, and with Sig Hart, De Bray's partner, Otto traveled to America and Chicago in 1926, and was signed to a contract.

Otto's first professional fight was on Tuesday October 19, at the Chicago Coliseum, versus Big Ben Sullivan of Milwaukee, in an eight round semi-final. Von Porat, at 182 pounds to Sullivan's 193, was cautious in round one; but in round two, a right to the jaw followed by a left to the chin, put Sullivan down for the count. This was the first in a total of 22 bouts that von Porat would fight in Chicago.

A month later, on November 26, von Porat was back in the Coliseum, in the main event this time, against Jimmy Delaney, out of St. Paul. Delaney was a young veteran, having fought 65 times since 1919 and was a very clever boxer. This was a severe test for Otto, in only his second pro start.

But, Otto came thru with flying colors! He floored Delaney in the first round, again in the third and twice more in the fourth. Von Porat won the deserved ten round decision; but he badly bruised both hands doing so.

The victory over Delaney, plus the fact he scored four knockdowns doing it, attracted the attention of Madison Square Garden promoter Tex Rickard and he wired an offer for von Porat to appear in New York on December 22. Rickard, ever the showman, presented three heavyweight ten rounders; in each of which a Scandinavian fighter was involved. In the main event, Harry Persson of Sweden appeared; in the semi-windup, Knute Hansen of Denmark was featured; and in the bottom ten, Otto von Porat of Norway was to make his New York debut.

Von Porat reminisced about his Delaney fight some years later, saying: "My victory over Delaney put me in a much too flattering light. I lacked both routine and experience, and very well knew that I wasn't as good as the impression my win gave."

When Tex Rickard's offer came, Manager De Bray was ecstatic. "Otto!" he cried. "Madison Square Garden! The dream of every fighter!"

But von Porat pointed out that his hands were still not healed, that he had difficulty holding a knife and fork and that he was in no condition to fight until his hands were strong again.

De Bray pleaded; pointing out the honor and the money to be gained. "You can not let a chance like this get away from you, Otto!" Finally, von Porat gave in.

Von Porat faced a real challenge in New York. Not only was he fighting in the most famous boxing arena in the world, he was meeting Martin Burke of New Orleans. Burke was another veteran, of 69 fights, and besides meeting men like Gene Tunney, the current heavyweight king, he was also a sparring partner for Jack Dempsey. Otto had to be nervous, as well as intimidated by his surroundings.

Von Porat's awe of his New York circumstances affected his performance. Otto really had not had proper time to acclimated himself to the more demanding American style of fighting and should not have been matched with such an experienced foe in only his third fight, especially when he had two bad hands.

Besides his bad hands, von Porat had only one other physical handicap; but it was a very unusual one. He was possessed of very narrow nostrils, which affected his breathing. This meant that while in the ring he was forced to breathe thru his mouth. This created a further complication- he couldn't wear a rubber mouthpiece like other boxers and, as a result, suffered many mouth cuts.

"That night," Otto wrote in one of the books he wrote about his career, "we were both nervous; an old boxer and a young one. It started, and I threw two punches- one with each hand- and I was finished for the night- two broken hands. Burke didn't understand why I didn't do something. It took him a few rounds, but then he noticed how I grimaced in pain even when I blocked a punch. Now he understood."

Burke simply knew too much for von Porat. He dropped a tired von Porat in the eighth round for a nine count, a von Porat who had swallowed much of his own blood when an emboldened Burke had landed flush and cut Otto's mouth. Von Porat rose, but was dropped again and the referee stopped the fight. Not only did Otto get tagged with his first loss, a humiliating technical knockout; he also broke both hands!

Due to his broken hands, von Porat was idle until April 1927, when he made the first of seven consecutive appearances in Minneapolis. Von Porat had to win approval from Minneapolis promoter Mike Collins first, by going three rounds with a Collins- picked opponent, in a private workout, before he was accepted. ~~Von Porat also impressed Minneapolis fistic~~

Von Porat also impressed Minneapolis fistic followers in his pre-fight workouts and stepped into the Kenwood Armory ring on April 1 as the 10 to 7 favorite, in his match versus Duke Horn. Horn was the soul of modesty when he predicted: "I am sorry to say I intend to knock von Porat out in the first round, because I have a supper date with a lady at 10.30 p.m." The still-growing Otto weighed 183 and Horn was 190. The match drew the biggest crowd of the indoor boxing season and the biggest gate.

Von Porat dominated the entire fight. He outboxed Horn and shook him repeatedly with right crosses, left hooks and uppercuts. Otto put Duke on the canvas in the fifth and floored him twice in the seventh, the bell saving Horn. Duke couldn't answer the bell for the eighth round.

"I have fought many hard hitters in my career," Horn said the next day. "But none of them hit me like von Porat did. Believe me, that Norwegian packs a murderous wallop." Horn said nothing about what his lady friend said when he didn't show up on time for supper.

Minneapolis sports editor, George Barton, also a noted referee, who had worked the von Porat- Horn fight; became an instant fan of Otto's, writing in glowing terms of his boxing style and his gentlemanly bearing outside the ring. He asked Otto how he became interested in boxing.

Otto enlightened Barton by saying, "Like all Norwegian boys I was always interested in athletics of all sorts. I was a fairly good skater, swimmer and runner. One day some of my friends invited me to box at a gymnasium in Oslo. I had noticed in reading boxing articles that the use of the left hand was stressed as an important weapon. So when I boxed with my friends I instinctively stuck my left arm out straight and they kept running into it. The way I used my left hand and handled myself in general, evidently caught the fancy of the club's physical director. He gave me my first lessons and I developed so rapidly under his training that I earned the right to represent Norway in the Olympic games at Paris in 1924.

"My love for the sport and the opportunity to earn goodly sums of money caused me to try my luck as a professional pugilist. It is my hope to win a comfortable fortune in the ring and then retire while still a young man, to follow some other profession or business."

Indicative of von Porat's acceptance by Minneapolis boxing fans was his introduction in the ring a week later, just before another Norwegian, Haakon Hansen was to face Jock Malone. Otto received the greatest reception ever tendered a boxer in Minneapolis; the rafters of the Armory shaking from the cheers given von Porat.

On April 19 von Porat met Tiny Herman, of Omaha, another veteran campaigner, and scored a four round knockout victory, before another packed house.

Promoter Mike Collins quickly arranged for Otto's third appearance, on May 20, against Sully Montgomery, of Ft. Worth, Texas. Montgomery was almost as tall as von Porat, being 6 foot 2 inches; and, at 199 pounds, outweighed Otto by 18 pounds. The fight went the full ten rounds and what a battle it was!

The two men went at each other hammer-and-tongs in the first round, taking turns landing heavily. Von Porat had a slight edge and added to his lead in the next two rounds, putting Montgomery down for a count of four in the second. They both came out strong in the fourth, Otto being the aggressor. But, as von Porat started a left lead, Montgomery beat him to the punch and landed a murderous right to the jaw. Down went Otto, for nine.

Montgomery put von Porat down again, for eight, shortly after. Otto got up and tottered around the ring. Another right to the chin by Sully. Down a third time for Otto. Up at nine and Montgomery decks von Porat a fourth time. Otto takes another nine count and staggers into his own corner; but he survives the round.

Nobody in the crowd of 5,000 expects von Porat to come out for the fifth. But he does, and he boxes beautifully on the defensive, going away, even winning the round. He was fully recovered by the sixth and then put Montgomery down twice in the seventh. The crowd had cheered themselves hoarse. Von Porat finished the stronger and was given the decision.

Two weeks later von Porat and Montgomery were rematched. This time they fought in the new Minneapolis Auditorium before a capacity crowd of 15,000; the largest crowd ever to attend a boxing show in Minneapolis. Otto won decisively, dropping Sully for a nine count in round one and having Montgomery reeling on several occasions.

Six weeks later von Porat met, for the first time, one of the men who would eventually play the dominant part in deciding his future in the ring; "The King of the Cane-Brakes", Young Stribling, of Macon, Georgia. Stribling had already fought 184 times, and had appeared a dozen times, in eleven different cities, thus far in 1927. Before the match, for which Stribling was to be paid \$5,000, he predicted, "I will win by knockout before the fifth."

Von Porat countered this by saying, "Fighting and not talking is my business. I think I will top off Mr. Stribling about the third or fourth round."

Sports editor George Barton, in his column some days before the fight, made some keen observations. "In addition to his natural boxing skill and bruising punching power, Stribling perhaps is the trickiest fighter in the ring. He knows more ways of tying up an opponent, keeping him off balance by spinning him and making him look bad generally, than anyone fighting."

Poor von Porat. The fight went the full ten rounds and Stribling won by a country mile, making Otto's life miserable from round one to the finish. Von Porat kept boring in, but the blows which had won him all his previous victories fell short or missed. Stribling beat him to the punch most of the time and kept him so busy warding off punches that his attack was totally nullified.

Otto's left eye was cut in the seventh, but he still kept coming and won the plaudits of the crowd for his courage. However, the long and short of it was, Otto received a severe shellacking and suffered a damaging blow to his confidence.

Still a drawing card though, von Porat was signed for an August 23 match, versus Big Boy Peterson, a 21 year old Swedish lumberjack from Mississippi. Peterson, at 6 foot 3 inches, lacked the skill and finesse that Otto possessed, but he was a hard puncher and a dangerous man in the ring.

Von Porat, affected more than he realized by his defeat by Young Stribling, was in trouble almost before the echo of the opening bell had ended. Peterson rushed from his corner and threw a round house right to the chin that sent Otto down for a count of four. Arising in a shaky state, von Porat retreated and hardly landed a punch in round one. The second round saw this shocking state of affairs continue- Peterson chasing and von Porat running.

In the third round von Porat opened up and began belting the big Swede. Late in ~~the~~ this session Otto caught Peterson with a right, dropping him. Big Boy held on for the remainder of the round, as Otto failed to press his advantage. Peterson roared back, and from the fourth to the tenth he intimidated von Porat and had all the better of the action. Von Porat finally came back to life in the tenth and last round, almost putting Peterson away; but it was too late- Peterson was a big winner.

Old friend, sports editor Barton gave it to von Porat in print a few days later, taking him to task for his performance. "It is difficult," Barton said, "to understand von Porat's attitude in his fight with Peterson. Otto's indifference has ruined his drawing power in this section." Barton went on ~~to say~~<sup>to</sup> say that von Porat had been paid \$14,000 for his Minneapolis fights.

Against Peterson, Otto was undoubtedly bothered by the Swede's awkward style and was on the defensive immediately, when floored by the first punch. During his entire career he was plagued by the awkward and the tricky, or unorthodox opponents. Shortly after the embarrassing defeat by Peterson, a depressed von Porat returned to Norway for a family visit.

Otto stayed just three weeks in Oslo and while on board ship on the return voyage, received a cable from Manager De Bray saying- start training- have signed for Peterson rematch in two weeks.

When Otto got back to Minneapolis he discovered that his quarters at training camp had been burglarized and everything he owned had been stolen. Although von Porat was quoted by the press as predicting he would beat Peterson, the burglary and things in general had Otto so depressed that the fight was lost before it began.

Against Peterson, von Porat gave the appearance of being frightened to death. Big Boy smothered Otto with punches from the word go, flooring Otto in the first round. In fact, Otto didn't land a punch in the opening round. Only in the sixth and seventh did he hammer the Swede. Peterson tossed all boxing rules out the window

as he waded into von Porat. He hit him in the clinches, he hit him on the break, he hit him below the belt. Peterson won again and von Porat was in disgrace in Minneapolis.

Von Porat was at a crossroad he later admitted. "It bothered me that I had lost to that fellow. Under normal circumstances I should have knocked him out in the first round," Otto said.

For some reason, the courage von Porat had visibly demonstrated against Montgomery and Stribling was noticeably absent in his two fights with Peterson. Von Porat gave every appearance of being totally disoriented, and frightened. Also, Peterson had taken an extreme dislike to von Porat and used every method he could, fair and foul, to beat Otto.

"I then decided to withdraw from the ring for good," declared von Porat. "It was better to stop before I got damaged beyond repair by an opponent with more snap in his fists than Peterson. But then," Otto continued, "Ed Stevenson appeared like a godsend from heaven."

Managers De Bray and Hart, by now felt Von Porat wouldn't amount to much and were receptive to selling von Porat's contract, for \$1,500 each. They turned over complete managerial control to Stevenson, a prominent Chicago plumbing contractor.

Correctly assuming that Minneapolis was no longer a good stamping-ground, Stevenson moved von Porat to Chicago. The move paid off. Otto, under Stevenson's canny guidance, soon established himself as a popular attraction and hot drawing card in nine Chicago matches.

Von Porat scored six knockouts and after winning a decision from Pierre Charles of Belgium, was again signed by promoter Tex Rickard for another Madison Square Garden appearance.

And here von Porat came up against another of the opponents who played a significant role in his career- "The Basque Woodchopper", Paulino Uzcudun. The Spaniard in 1928 was the most feared heavy-weight in the world and was rated, along with Jack Sharkey, as the biggest threat to the title.

Stevenson was confident von Porat had greatly improved since his last Garden appearance and, on the strength of the experience he had gained over the last year, was ready to vault over Uzcudun and use the fight as the stepping stone to the heights of a championship match.

Uzcudun, unlike other European fighters, did not fight in the customary straight-up, classic style. The thick-set, beetle-browed Basque, whose left arm was frozen in a permanent forty-five degree angle as the result of a poorly set broken arm, was a hooker and he fought from an awkward crouch. He moved forward like a crustacean crab and was possessed of an incredible shell-like defense. All arms and elbows, Paulino seemed to have an armored hide the way punches bounced harmlessly off him. He looked like the missing link and was enough to strike fear in the bravest man's heart.

A near sellout crowd turned out, and, as usual with the awkward, unorthodox men, Otto had trouble. "unexpectedly," Otto recalled, "while waiting for the bell for the first round, like an explosion the nervousness came over me. The bell rang and for the first two minutes it was like I was paralyzed and I was being chased around the ring." Suddenly Otto was on the floor, from a right hook. He got up, shakily and went on the defense. However, in the fourth, von Porat rallied and stopped the Spaniard in his tracks with a succession of rights to the jaw along with some well placed uppercuts. In the fifth Otto went back to being cautious and Paulino caught him with a left hook to the temple and put him down again. Weathering the storm, von Porat boxed on the retreat until late in the ninth when he brought the crowd to its feet by staggering Uzcudun at the bell. Otto woke up some more in the tenth and rocked the Basque repeatedly; but couldn't put him away, although the crowd was yelling encouragement. Obviously, Uzcudun won, his early lead too much to overcome; but Stevenson felt encouraged by von Porat's late surge.

Otto finished the year by winning every round in shellacking King Solomon in Chicago, in November; but bruised his hands and had to remain idle until January 1929.

When talking about years like 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929- perhaps we should look at these years in some sort of historical perspective; to better understand them.

1926- Cal Coolidge is in the White House, presiding over the greatest prosperity ever known.

1927- Lucky Lindy, Charles F. Lindbergh, flies solo across the Atlantic; New York to Paris- and starts the air age. Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs for the Yankees. Dempsey and Tunney fight in Chicago's Soldier Field, drawing 2 million dollars; the largest live gate in boxing history. And Big Bill Thompson is mayor of Chicago.

1928- Herbert Hoover replaces Coolidge in the White House and promises a chicken in every pot.

1929- the Cubs win a pennant and lose the world series, as usual. The stock market crashes in October, spawning a depression that will last until the Japs attack Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Von Porat scored two quick knockouts in January 1929, drawing record crowds in Grand Rapids and Davenport. Then, on February 1 it's back to New York, where Otto knocks out Jack Gagnon, of Canada, in the fourth round.

In his next fight von Porat squared off with another significant foe, "The Hard Rock From Down Under", Tom Heeney. The top-rated New Zealander had lost a title fight to Gene Tunney, just a few months before, in Tunney's swan-song to boxing, and was looking to use von Porat as the stepping stone to re-establish himself as the number one contender.

The Chicago Coliseum was jammed with 9,000 fans, to see Heeney and von Porat and the gate was \$50,000. Otto gave Heeney a decisive beating, but refused to kayo the gallant New Zealander, even though Tom was barely able to totter thru the final rounds. Heeney's purse of \$17,000 helped make up for his 18 stitches and Otto's \$12,000 purse was his largest to date.

Von Porat had many virtues in the ring. He could knock out a man with one punch; he was a better than average boxer; he had a pretty good defense and he could take it. He also trained rigorously and was definitely not a man of dissipating talents. Otto had one serious fault however, which, at crucial times in his career, caused him to be beaten when he shouldn't have been.

Von Porat was as nervous and high-strung in the ring as a brand-new bride being carried over the threshold. Against stand-up fighters like himself, Otto had no trouble, his nervousness disappearing as soon as he got into action. It was against the unorthodox fighters; men who weaved and bobbed, or crouched, or bounced up and down, who made him tense and nervous.

~~His losses to date had all been for this reason.~~ Against Johnny Risko, "The Cleveland Rubber Man", his next opponent, von Porat suffered the same fate. In a fight he should have won, a packed Boston Garden saw Otto completely bewildered and flabbergasted by a swarming, bouncing Risko. Johnny was five inches shorter than Otto, but his crouching, weaving style forced von Porat to punch down at what proved to be a very elusive target.

At every opportunity in close, Risko snarled and swore at Otto. In the later rounds he also swore at von Porat in Croatian. At the end of the ten rounds von Porat stood in his corner, shaking from a severe case of nervous frustration. The Risko defeat cost von Porat a pending match with Jack Sharkey and a possible purse of \$50,000.

Von Porat came back to Chicago and quickly redeemed himself by scoring two knockouts. In his first bout after the Risko fiasco Otto stiffened Jack De Mave in the second round with the hardest punch he ever threw. A terrific right to the pit of the stomach sent De Mave flying backward to the canvas, gasping for air. Poor De Mave tried desperately to suck in air, and it took ten minutes to revive him.

Von Porat's other kayo victim was Emmett Rocco, who had just beaten Johnny Risko. Rocco lasted eight rounds before being counted out.

Another fight in New York, in June, saw von Porat hand out the first career knockout to tough Meyer Christner, who had lost very close decisions to Sharkey and Uzcudun and was a big New York favorite. Otto was now back in the limelight, rated number five. But the Christner win was costly; von Porat again severely injured a hand. While recuperating, Otto went back to Norway for another visit.

Von Porat was back in action on October 4, destroying Tom Sayers in the first round at Peoria. In November, he flattened Charley Smith, of England, in the first round.

A big money shot in New York, on December 9 was a golden opportunity for von Porat. His opponent was another English heavyweight, Phil Scott; who had a penchant for falling down and clutching his groin everytime he was hit anywhere near the belt and who was renowned for the number of fights he had won on fouls. The reward for the winner was to be a March 1930 match with Jack Sharkey; that winner to meet Schmeling for the vacant title. Adding to the bout's significance, and giving it even more of a box office stimulus, was that the legendary Jack Dempsey would referee- his first major referee assignment.

Sure enough- Otto was winning handily when Scott leaped into a von Porat body punch in the second round and went down.

Dempsey counted loud and clear- three, four, five, six- then he stopped and looked alarmingly at Scott; who lay on his back with his feet pulled up, clutching his groin and whimpering- "Foul! Foul!"

Scott's manager, seeing Dempsey's halting of the count, shouted, "Foul! Foul!"

Dempsey looked from Scott on the canvas over to von Porat; who stood in the center of the ring, looking anxiously around for some one who would tell him it was all a mistake. Jack bent down and helped Scott to his feet and the Englishman's handlers rushed out to carry him to his corner. After a hasty conference with the judges, Dempsey declared Scott the winner on a foul.

"The spectators began booing like crazy," von Porat recalled. "I turned red with shame, but it helped when Stevenson whispered- 'it isn't you they're booing, my boy- it's Scott!'. Otto's only consolation was the \$20,000 purse he received, his largest to date. Years later, von Porat still felt that Dempsey's in-experience as a referee cost him the fight.

A month later von Porat tangled once more with Uzcudun in New York. Again Otto froze up and let Paulino take the decision. Manager Stevenson began to realize that unless von Porat overcame his nervousness in the ring against certain opponents, he would never become champion. Bruising his hands on Uzcudun, von Porat couldn't fight again until April, when he beat Angus Snyder in St. Paul.

On May 28, von Porat knocked out an old victim, Jack Gagnon, at the Chicago Stadium. Gagnon had just kayoed another Chicago favorite, Tuffy Griffith, and Otto's newest win restored his prestige.

Now came another golden opportunity for von Porat, and manager Stevenson. It would also be the last such opportunity in von Porat's career. "The King of the Cane-Brakes", Young Stribling, agreed to meet von Porat on June 18 in the Stadium. Strib was in line for a title shot against Schmeling, who had just won the title; but von Porat could, with a win over his old foe, replace him as Schmeling's opponent.

"Stevenson's arrangement for me to fight Young Stribling shook me up a bit," admitted von Porat. "Of all the fighters I had hoped to meet, he was the one I feared most. Then too," Otto went on, "I always became more nervous when I knew my countrymen had great expectations of me. The bigger demand they put on me, the more afraid I became that I would disappoint them."

Excitement about the fight soon reached fever pitch and Chicago fight fans rushed to buy tickets. Then came a spate of news that threatened to cancel the fight and had to only make von Porat more nervous. Rumor had it that Stribling had broken his left hand in a recent fight. He sought a week's postponement, but the Illinois Boxing Commission had their doctor examine the hand. The doctor said that while the hand was flabby because it had recently been in a cast, there was no breakage. The fight was however, pushed back two days, to June 20, leaving von Porat two more days to fret.

Stribling had now had 257 fights and had literally fought everybody. Von Porat, on the other hand, had fought a much fewer 35 times.

Stribling had several advantages: his distinctive style, a blend of speed and maneuverability; his wealth of experience and his ability to make his opponents fight as he wished them to fight. One of his favorite punches was an overhand right, which he threw when in close. He was a master at feinting, and could feint even the classiest boxers off balance and out of position.

He was mainly a straight puncher and was one of the very few fighters who knew how to punch inside hooks, instead of simply trying to block them. (That's a lost art, today.)

At fight time, 20, 956 persons had jammed into the Stadium, setting a new indoor record. The gross gate was \$80,000. In another first- the fight was to be broadcast on radio, coast-to-coast, and was the first fight ever to be broadcast from the Stadium.

Von Porat fretted himself into a stew and entered the ring white-faced and shaking. Stribling entered the ring as if he didn't have a care in the world, bad hand notwithstanding. Indeed, Dr. M.S. Corbett had injected novcaine into Strib's left hand in the dressing room a half-hour before, warning that it was good for about an hour. And yet- "The King of the Cane-Brakes", shadow-boxed in his corner, smiled, and waved to the audience, completely ignoring his opponent. Von Porat eyed Stribling nervously from across the ring.

Otto himself admitted, in his 1942 book, that Stribling had deliberately obtained the psychological upperhand. "This can mean so much in competition," he pointed out, "where otherwise it is equal. The one who doesn't even bother to take stock of his opponent, voluntarily gives the impression of being stronger than the one who nervously studies his opponent in the minutes before the bout starts."

Finally the bell sent the men out for action. Stribling fought a surprising battle. He kept poking long lefts into von Porat's face from the start. Von Porat moved after Stribling, trying to set himself to get in a telling punch.

They moved around the ring, Strib shooting straight lefts and von Porat looking to counter. In the clinches, Stribling was very careful to tie-up Otto's right. This pattern continued for over two minutes. Every one in the crowd sat tense, anticipating incipient fire works.

Von Porat kept moving forward, watching Stribling warily. He shot out a right hand which caught Stribling high on the head and Strib quickly moved into a clinch, tie-ing up Otto's right. Then, coming out of the clinch, he set his trap. Using his right hand placed under Otto's left arm pit, he pulled Otto toward him.

Stribling then feinted with a left and caught Otto with a right to the head that spun von Porat around. Otto tried to back away but Stribling leaped forward and hit von Porat with a left hook to the chin, and Otto dropped flat on his back, like a pole-axed steer, while the crowd went wild.

Von Porat never stirred as he was counted out and he had to be carried back to his corner and revived. The time was 2 minutes and 50 seconds. Otto wasn't the only one in the Stadium that night who had to be revived. A lot of his countrymen lost their shirts betting on von Porat.

Otto had two more Chicago fights that year, but things were not the same. An october fight only drew 4,500 fans; while he had to travel ten rounds in November to win a decision from old Jack Renault. Symptomatic of the changed attitude toward von Porat was the fact that when he was announced as the winner of a close fight, the crowd booed- a most unusual sound to be directed at von Porat.

Von Porat returned to Norway and was gone for two years. He did engage in four fights in Europe, in 1931 and 1932, scoring knockouts each time. Otto solidly established himself as the Scandinavian champion in 1931, kayoing Soren Peterson of Denmark in June, at Oslo, and then sending all Swedish flags in Stockholm down to half-mast when he destroyed the old champion of 'Svenska', Harry Persson, in 2 minutes of round one before 50,000 people in Ko-Stadium.

In 1932 he flattened Maurice Griselle of France, in Oslo, and then went to Berlin in October, where he pounded Hein Mueller into a wreck. He returned to Chicago in January 1933, hoping to be able to scale the Chicago boxing heights once more.

The boxing game in Chicago had hit bottom in 1933, just like everything else. But promoter Sammy Wolf signed von Porat to meet another Chicago favorite, Tuffy Griffith, for Friday February 24, at the Coliseum. Wolf hoped that pairing these big names would find fans of both storming the box office. Unfortunately, this was 1933 and not 1929 or 1930, when an Otto versus Tuffy fight would have drawn a gate of at least \$100,000.

Still, 5,000 persons came out, but the gate was just \$7,000- a far cry from what used to be. Followers of the two fighters instinctively sensed that neither von Porat nor Griffith were the fighters they had been just a few years back.

Bad luck was with von Porat to the end. Thru a weird set of circumstances, von Porat didn't eat his pre-fight meal until 5 p.m. Then, every preliminary fight ended in a knockout and von Porat and Griffith had to go on at 9 p.m., instead of the usual 10 p.m..

For six rounds von Porat punched Griffith almost at will, having Tuffy on the verge of a kayo several times. In the seventh round Griffith rallied strongly, punching von Porat around the ring and digging in with several solid shots to the body. Otto was in a bad way at the bell and proceeded to vomit in his corner. Von Porat was unable to come out for the eighth round and was even taken to Columbus hospital for the night.

Von Porat had just three more USA fights, winning them all; but his last Chicago fight was a tipoff as to how far he had gone back in ability- he closed his eyes when punching! A clear indication that he no longer possessed a strong degree of dedication in the ring.

In his final American fight, he returned to Minneapolis. "Otto surprised everybody in Minneapolis when he flattened Dick Daniels," Ed Stevenson recalled. "Von Porat was supposed to be all washed up; but he showed everybody he was still a good man."

Von Porat returned to Europe after the Daniels fight, to meet an old victim, Pierre Charles, in Brussels. Charles had improved greatly and was now the European heavyweight champion.

"I begged Otto not to go back and fight Charles," Stevenson remembered, sadly. "But Otto he say, 'I can lick Charles easy'; so what could I do. I just let him go."

Charles knocked von Porat out in the second round, in December 1933, and Otto gradually slipped into the limbo of fistic obscurity. He did fight four more times however, in 1934. He won a bout in Paris in April and then won in Cardiff, Wales in May; beating South African Don McCorkindale, a top-ranked boxer, even though he broke his right hand in round one and had to fight a brilliant one-handed battle for ten rounds.

In September he was held to a draw in Paris, by a fourth-rate French fighter and then was soundly trounced by a third-rate visiting Negro heavy, at Geneva, in November. And that was von Porat's finale. As Otto himself said later, "these last two fights told me my luck was running out in my career, and I decided to quit before someone got hurt."

Those fans who were fortunate to see von Porat in action in his prime will never forget him. Few heavyweights could punch as hard as von Porat and fewer still could excite fight fans in the way he did.

Otto's beautiful straight-up style, the devastating right hand punch, which made his opponents do all sorts of fascinating things after they were hit; these and other ring attributes his fans enthusiastically turned out to see.

Von Porat told of a meeting with Georges Carpentier, the greatest of all French boxers, in 1929. "To heck with the public," Carpentier admonished. "Do not accept those blows that can be avoided. Parry, block, duck, step aside. A boxer who takes punches, to prove his courage, becomes punch-drunk.

"Effective defensive boxing," continued Georges, "is the only thing that pays off in the long run."

"I worked energetically from that day," said von Porat, "to perfect my defense, without thereby losing any of my offensive powers."

"Otto was a good fighter," manager Stevenson insisted. "He hit hard and he could hurt a man real bad. But Otto was too much of a gentleman in the ring. He didn't want to hurt anyone."

Stevenson smiled as he recalled the days when von Porat was in the limelight. "Otto was a very nervous fellow. Very high-strung. If I could have gotten him to relax, I think he would have been champion. But anyway," Stevenson laughed, "Otto and me, we made plenty money."

After his last fight in 1934, von Porat ran a physical culture school, then he joined the faculty of the Handels Gymnasium, a commercial school in Oslo, where he taught until his retirement in 1970.

Otto found time to write three books on his boxing career; published in 1936, 1942 and 1946. In his 1942 book, von Porat mentioned that, other than a few small facial scars, he had not suffered any permanent injury during his fighting years. Also, he retained his mental powers, his hearing and eyesight were excellent and he was in perfect physical condition.

He wrote about other fighters, who had earned big income and spent every cent. "They went to the dogs with full music," he commented. "The fate of old boxers is as complex as life itself," he went on. "Some come unscathed out of the ring, others are ruined for life. Some manage to hold on to their money, others wind up in the gutter. Some continue to remain popular far into old age, others are forgotten before the ink from the newspaper account of their last fight dries."

"I wouldn't want to have missed those years I earned my bread as a professional boxer. It taught me to work, as professional boxing is very hard work and demands discipline, patience and self-denial.

"I can look back on my boxing career as an adventure; where the dark chapters only get the lighter ones to shine with greater brilliance," he concluded.

There are no men fighting today, of the stature of Otto von Porat; no one who captured the attention like he did and brought fight fans pouring into arenas in breathless expectation.

In his last years, von Porat was in poor health and passed away on October 14, 1982, at Baerum, a **small** community near Oslo.

The many years that have passed since he fought however, will never diminish the admiration and respect his many loyal fans still cherish of him.

Otto von Porat! A superb athlete, a wonderful gentleman and a giant among men.

The End

**Robert Soderman**  
**200 S. Kenilworth**  
**Mt. Prospect, IL 60056**

DATE	RESEARCHED YES (NO)	OPPONENT	CITY (ARENA)	RESULT
1926				
OCT. 19	YES	BIG BEN SULLIVAN	CHICAGO (COLISEUM)	W TO 2
	(NOTE: THIS WAS VERY FIRST PRO FIGHT.)			
NOV. 26	YES	JIMMY DELANEY	CHICAGO (COLISEUM)	W DEC 10
DEC. 22	✓	MARTIN BURKE	NEW YORK (GARDEN)	L TO 6
	(NOTE: OTTO SUPPOSEDLY BROKE HAND.)			
1927				
APR. 1	?	DUTE HORN	MINNEAPOLIS	W TO 7
✓ 19	YES	TINY HERMAN	✓	W TO 4
MAY 20	✓	SULLY MONTGOMERY	✓	NO DEC 10
	(NOTE: OTTO WON NEWSPAPER DECISION.)			
JUNE 7	YES	SULLY MONTGOMERY	MINNEAPOLIS	NO DEC 10
	(NOTE: OTTO WON NEWSPAPER DECISION.)			
JULY 21	YES	YOUNG STRIBLING	MINNEAPOLIS	NO DEC 10
	(NOTE: OTTO LOST NEWSPAPER DECISION.)			
AUG. 23	YES	BIG BOY PETERSON	MINNEAPOLIS	NO DEC 10
	(NOTE: OTTO LOST NEWSPAPER DECISION.)			
NOV. 11	?	BIG BOY PETERSON	MINNEAPOLIS	NO DEC 10
DEC. 19	YES	TED SANDWIMA	CHICAGO (COLISEUM)	W TO 2
1928				
JAN. 20	YES	SAM SILVERBURE	CHICAGO	W TO 2
FEB. 27	✓	GORDON SMITH	✓	W TO 1
APR. 30	✓	TINY ADEBUCK	✓	W TO 1
MAY 15	✓	NAPOLEON VAUX ROYAL	✓	L DEC 10
JUNE 11	✓	TONY STABENAU	✓	W TO 2
JULY 5	✓	SANDY SEIFERT	✓	W TO 5
AUG. 9	✓	PIERRE CHARLES	✓	W DEC 10
OCT. 17	✓	CHUCK WIGGINS	✓	W Foul 3
NOV. 5	✓	PAVLINO VZLOVON	NEW YORK (GARDEN)	L DEC 10
✓ 27	✓	KING SOLOMON	CHICAGO (HIPPODROME)	W DEC 10
1929				
JAN. 11	YES	BATTLING LEVINSKY	GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.	W TO 5
✓ 17	✓	TOM SAYERS	DAYENPORT, IOWA	W TO 3
FEB. 1	?	JACK GARNON	NEW YORK (GARDEN)	W TO 4
MAR. 12	YES	TOM HEENEY	CHICAGO (COLISEUM)	W DEC 10
APR. 5	✓	JOHNNY RISTO	BOSTON (GARDEN)	L DEC 10

OTTO VON FURAT RECORD - REVISED

P. 2 OF 3

DATE	RESEARCHED YES (NO)	OPONENT	CITY (ARENA)	RESULT
1929 (CONTINUED)				
MAY 10	YES	JACK DE MAYE	CHICAGO (STADIUM)	W KO 3
JUNE 10	✓	EMMETT ROCCO	✓	W KO 8
JUNE 27	✓	H. P. CHRISTNER	NEW YORK (VANEE STADIUM)	W KO 3
OCT. 4	2.	TOM SAYERS	PEORIA, ILL.	W KO 1
NOV. 4	2.	CHARLEY SMITH	CHICAGO	W KO 1
DEC. 9	YES	PAUL SCOTT	NEW YORK (GARDEN)	L FOUK 2
1930				
JAN. 10	YES	PAVLINO VZLIVAN	NEW YORK (GARDEN)	L DEC 10
APR. 1	✓	ANGUS SNYDER	ST. PAUL	W DEC 10
MAY 28	✓	JACK EAGNON	CHICAGO (STADIUM)	W KO 6
JUNE 20	✓	YOUNG STRIBLING	✓	L TROBY 1
OCT. 10	✓	ANGUS SNYDER	✓ (CONISEUM)	L FOUK 1
NOV. 6	✓	JACK RENAVLT	✓ (STADIUM)	W DEC 10
1931				
JUNE 20 <sup>2</sup>	2.	SOREN PETERSON	OSLO, NORWAY	W KO 5
AUG. 23	2.	HARRY PERSSON	STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN	W KO 1
1932				
JUNE 17	2.	MAURICE BRISELLE	OSLO	W KO 6
OCT. 21	2.	HEIN MUELLER	BERLIN, GERMANY	W KO 6
1933				
FEB. 24	YES	TUFFY GRIFFITH	CHICAGO (STADIUM)	L TROBY 8
MAR. 24	✓	BIFF BENNETT	EAV CLAIRE, WISC.	W KO 4 <sup>2</sup>
APR. 21	✓	HANS BIRTIE	CHICAGO (STADIUM)	W DEC 10
JUNE 1	✓	DICK DANIELS	MINNEAPOLIS	W KO 2 <sup>2</sup>
SEPT. 29	2.	HANS SCHOENRATH	OSLO	W DEC 10
NOV. 16	2.	GUSTAY LIMOUSIN	✓	W DEC 10
DEC. 16	2.	PIERRE CHARLES	BRUSSELS, BELGIUM	L TROBY 2
1934				
APR. 16	2.	PAVL SWIDERSTI	PARIS, FRANCE	W DEC 10
MAY 21	2.	DON MCCORTINDALE	CARDIFF, WALES	W DEC 10
SEPT. 28	2.	ALF SAVVAGE	PARIS	W DEC 10 <sup>2</sup>
NOV. 17	2.	OBEDIAH WALTER	GENEVA, SWITZERLAND	L DEC 10

YEAR	TOTAL FLIGHTS	W NO	W DEC	W FOUL	L FOUL	L LOSS	W DEC	NO DEC	
								WIN	LOSE
RECAPITULATION									
1926	3	1	1				1		
1927	8	3						2	3
1928	10	5	2	1			2		
1929	11	8	1		1		1		
1930	6	1	2		1	1	1		
1931	2	2							
1932	2	2							
1933	7	2	3			2			
1934	4		3				1		
TOTALS	53	24	12	1	2	4	5	2	3

FOUGHT IN 9 COUNTRIES: USA, NORWAY, SWEDEN, GERMANY, BELGIUM, FRANCE, WALES + SWITZERLAND.

FOUGHT IN 7 STATES: ILLINOIS, NEW YORK, MINNESOTA, MICHIGAN, IOWA, MASSACHUSETTS + WISCONSIN.

FOUGHT IN 7 EUROPEAN CITIES: OSLO, STOCKHOLM, BERLIN, BRUSSELS, PARIS, CARDIFF + GENEVA.

FOUGHT IN 9 USA CITIES: CHICAGO, NEW YORK, MINNEAPOLIS, GRAND RAPIDS, DAYTON PORT, BOSTON, PEORIA, ST. PAUL AND EAU CLAIRE.

OTTO von PORAT- ESTIMATED RING EARNINGS

10-19-26	Sullivan	Chicago	\$ 300	
11-26	Delaney	"	1,000	
12-22	Burke	New York	3,000	\$ 4,300
4- 1-27	Horn	Minneapolis	1,000	
4-19-27	Herman	"	2,000	
5- 20-27	Montgomery	"	2,300	
6- 7-	"	"	2,500	
7-21	Stribling	"	3,200	
8-23	Peterson	"	3,000	
11- 4	"	"	2,500	
12-19	Sandwina	Chicago	500	17,000
1-20-28	Silverburg	"	300	
2-27	Smith	"	300	
4-30	Roebuck	"	3,000	
5-15	Dorval	"	4,000	
6-11	Stabenau	"	1,500	
7- 5	Seifert	"	2,000	
8- 9	Charles	"	5,000	
10-17	Wiggins	"	3,000	
11- 5	Uzcudun	New York	10,000	
11-27	Solomon	Chicago	2,000	31,100
1-11-29	Levinsky	Grand Rapids	2,000	
1-17	Sayers	Davenport	1,500	
2- 1	Gagnon	New York	8,000	
3-13	Heeney	Chicago	12,000	
4- 5	Risko	Boston	12,000	
5-10	De Mave	Chicago	4,000	
6-10	Rocco	"	8,000	
6-27	Christner	New York	10,000	
10- 4	Sayers	Peoria	2,000	
11- 4	Smith	Chicago	3,000	
12- 9	Scott	New York	20,000	82,500
1-10-30	Uzcudun	"	10,000	
4- 1	Snyder	St. Paul	3,000	
5-28	Gagnon	Chicago	8,000	
6-20	Stribling	"	19,000	
10-10	Snyder	"	2,000	
11- 6	Renault	"	2,000	44,000
6-20-31	Peterson	Oslo	7,500	
8-23	Fersson	Stockholm	15,000	22,500
6-17-32	Griselle	Oslo	10,000	
10-21	Mueller	Berlin	10,000	20,000
2-24-33	Griffith	Chicago	2,000	
3-24	Bennett	Eau Claire	700	
4-21	Birkie	Chicago	1,500	
6- 1	Daniels	Minneapolis	3,000	
9-29	Schoenrath	Oslo	7,000	
11-16	Limousin	"	7,000	
12-16	Charles	Brussels	10,000	20,200
4-16-34	Swiderski	Paris	1,000	
5-21	McCorkindale	Cardiff	5,000	
9-28	Sauvage	Paris	700	
11-17	Walker	Geneva	1,000	5,700
Total Estimated Earnings				\$247,300

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### RE: The record-list of Gustav Eder

In 1932 he met Gunnar Andersson from Sweden two times in Göteborg [Gothenburg]. Actually, the first fight (March 24) went 10 rounds, not 8. According to the newspaper reports, Eder only took the first round while Andersson won the second, fourth, fifth, eighth and ninth.

In their second fight Andersson was way ahead on points, when he was badly headbutted by Eder and had to quit. He was bleeding heavily from the eyebrows.

Andersson was quite unlucky that year. In August he lost by the way of disqualification to Franta Nekolny in Prague [Praha]. A highly dubious verdict too.

### RE: Pete Sanstol in Sweden

Norwegian Pete Sanstöl fought two times in Sweden in 1935 as reported in IBRO # 60. However the correct info should read is as follows:

1935

<i>March 1</i>	Joey Carr, GB	Göteborg [Gothenburg], Sweden	KO 1
<i>April 26</i>	Werner Riethdorf, GER	Göteborg [Gothenburg], Sweden	TKO 8

With his quick win against Carr, Sanstöl felt he had let the audience down. He did not even break sweat during the fight. Thus, he decided to add some value to the show. Much to the delight of the spectators he went through his training program.

### RE: Otto von Porat

There was a nice article about Norwegian heavyweight Otto von Porat in IBRO # 61 by Robert Soderman.

Soderman concluded his article: "Otto von Porat! A superb athlete, a wonderful gentleman and a giant strong man". That judgement seems to be the consensus among sportswriters in Sweden as well. Swedish newspapers always treated Otto von Porat with respect.

Otto Wessel von Porat was born in the very small parish of Pjätteryd, in the county of Kronoberg, in the province of Småland. Date of Birth: September 29, 1903.

Soderman wrote that the attendance was some 50.000 when Swedish hero Harry Persson met Otto von Porat in Stockholm. The Scandinavian title was at stake on the afternoon of August 23, 1931. The fight generated great excitement in both Sweden and Norway. Otto von Porat was a big favorite in the pre-fight build-up.

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Unfortunately the turnout at the gates was poor. Maybe the Swedes sensed the outcome. According to various sources in the newspapers the amount of spectators were 12.000 or 10.000 or 7.500. In fact the exact total was only 8.619, including 1.122 free riders (journalists, free tickets, etc).

Harry Persson was only a shadow of himself. He was clearly depressed by domestic troubles at the time. He took the easy way out. After 2:45 in the first round he turned the back to his boxing career. Harry Persson received some 15.000 Swedish crowns, for his feeble effort, which was quite a payday at the time. Otto von Porat got a great deal more, including the total income from the sale of tickets in Norway.

Otto von Porat was also the referee on a few professional programs in Gothenburg and Stockholm during the 1930's and 1940's. As such he was a highly popular too.

Soderman paints a rosy picture of the relationship between von Porat and his manager Stevenson, perhaps a bit too rosy. The relationship with manager Stevenson was not free from strains. Otto von Porat told the Swedish newspapers that he was quite disappointed with his manager. They had disagreements about the money involved, and von Porat complained about the difficulties of getting good fights. Sounds all too familiar...