

## GENE TUNNEY ... "THE FIGHTING MARINE"

By Tracy Callis

Gene Tunney was the type of man that comes along once in a hundred years - the looks of a movie star, the intellect of a college professor, a student of Shakespeare, and Heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World.



He was the epitome of self-will, discipline, dedication and commitment to purpose. He evaluated his abilities, mapped out a plan, followed it to the letter, achieved his objectives, retired, and pursued other goals which he also accomplished.

Blessed with a beautiful, quick left jab and a knack for counter-fighting, Tunney was one of the great defensive fighters of all time. Gene fought at a fast, steady pace throughout an entire bout and did not seem to tire as the fight progressed.

He was a superb tactician who boxed his man dizzy until the time was right to move in with the heavy blows. His hands did not allow a sustained attack based upon heavy hitting but when the time came that increased power was needed, it was there.

Grantland Rice (1954 p 155) described Tunney as a "man who dedicated himself to a task as no other athlete." From 1919 to 1926, Gene conducted the "Dempsey Analysis" whereby he studied every move of the great champion. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of Dempsey, inside out, upside down, and backwards.

When he confronted Jack in the ring, he read his moves perfectly except for once - in the seventh round of their second fight. Some experts say he won 19 of the 20 rounds he fought with Dempsey.

Gene lost one fight during his professional career and beat that man (Harry Greb) four times afterwards. He was knocked down only once in his career (by Dempsey).

Durant and Rice (1946) wrote "The ex-Marine was a cool, intelligent boxer with a taste for literature. He was not a crowd pleaser but he always won." Litsky (1974 p 325) wrote "He was a brilliant scientific boxer with agility, speed, quickness, and power."



Durant (1976 p 75) commented "Like Corbett, Tunney was an intense student of ring craftsmanship. He planned each battle to combat his opponent's style with the thoroughness of a general mapping out a campaign."

He described Tunney as follows (1976 p 77), "Gene was a determined, cool, counter-puncher, a boxer. He was fast and dead game, and a punishing hitter, but he was no knockout artist. He scored his shares of K.O.'s, however, but mostly by wearing down his opponents rather than blasting them out of the ring Dempsey fashion. He was methodical, reserved, and cautious in the ring and out of it. He did not like the fight crowd, nor they him - especially when it became known that he could and did read good books."



Durant and Bettmann (1952 p 173) wrote "A cool, intelligent boxer with unlimited determination, Tunney was not an exciting performer, but he always won." They added "In many ways he was like Corbett ... essentially a ring scientist."

Odd (1974 pp 29-30) said Tunney had brains in addition to a fine physique. He added that Gene studied every move in boxing, from the feet upwards, and placed the avoidance of a punch above the delivery of one.

Harry Grayson, writer, once said Tunney "could be mean and cunning in the ring. He liked to break your nose and cut you up. He never cared how much he cut you, he would always take his time. He showed you the difference between great and near-great fighters" (see McCallum 1975 p 30).

Lardner (1972 p 251) wrote "Tunney was a synthetic fighter. He studied, analyzed, rehearsed, pondered. He saw his opponent as a case history, a specimen, an anatomical object. He analyzed his foe's strengths and weaknesses and constantly analyzed his own - noting improvements - to determine how best to attack and defend. There has never been a fighter who strove as assiduously to correct flaws, physical, mental, or spiritual."

He went on to say that Tunney had weak hands but made the best of the situation by learning how to box, hit accurately, and not waste punches. Later, when his hands had toughened to where he could smash hard blows, he profited by combining the boxing skills with the acquired hard-hitting.

McCallum (1975 pp 29 31) wrote "Tunney's ring career was a literal example of the triumph of mind over matter" and said "Few athletes in history ever have been better conditioned than Tunney. He developed stamina enough to step around at top speed every second of every round." He added that Gene had "nerves of ice."



Gutteridge (1975 p 85) said Tunney was "an underrated heavy with a fine style and the ability to absorb a hard punch."

Fleischer (1969 pp 277 279) analyzed the great heavyweights and said Tunney was the cleverest of the big boys since Corbett. He wrote that Gene was extremely fast, a master boxer, and an intelligent jabber. Further, he labeled Tunney as underrated and described him as being a cool, mechanical technician who was not colorful.

Grombach (1977 p 62) wrote "The story of Tunney presents a remarkable display of force of character and will to succeed." He was the man who would "rather beat Dempsey than have all the money in the world" (see McCallum 1974 p 111). He beat Dempsey twice and offered to fight him a third time. Dempsey refused.

McCallum (1974 p 123; 1975 pp 29-30) asserted "Tunney never entered the prize ring with the natural, instinctive fighting equipment of a Jeffries, a Johnson - or a Dempsey.



He wasn't a natural-born puncher, his physique was not adapted to fighting, and although he did possess superb reflexes, they had to be adjusted to boxing. Through sheer will power and mental exertion, Gene converted ordinary equipment into one of the finest fighting machines the ring has ever known."

Nat Fleischer ranked Tunney as the #8 All-Time Heavyweight. Charley Rose ranked him as the #6 All-Time Heavyweight. In the opinion of this writer, Tunney was the #1 All-Time Light Heavyweight and the #6 All-Time Heavyweight.

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