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Sullivan Rarely Had Luck On His Side

It was on the night of November 14, 1910, at the national Sporting Club in King Street, Covent garden, that Jim Sullivan beat Tom Thomas of Wales for the British middleweight title and Lonsdale belt. After having a rib broken as early as the 4th round, Sullivan gamely continued to complete the twenty - three minute - rounds to gain his victory.

But alas that injury suffered at the hands of Tom Thomas was later to prove an obstacle in his efforts to win the World's middleweight title. Soon after Sullivan was matched with Billy Papke of America (Papke had previously Ko'd Stanley Ketchell, World middleweight champion in twelve rounds .

This fight for the World's middleweight title took place at the Palladium, Oxford Circus. The fight was going in Sullivan's favor , when he unluckily stopped a right hander from Papke, which caught him on the rib that Tom Thomas had broken for him in his previous bout.

With that blow went Jim's chance of winning a World title. Close upon his defeat came Jim's decision to relinquish his Lonsdale belt, owing to ill health. Jim stayed out of the fight game for three years . During Jim's absence from the ring the Canning Town boxer Pat O'Keefe had been touring Australia with Tommy Burns, as his sparring partner. After Burns was defeated by Jack Johnson , for the World title, O'Keefe returned to England where he later fought Harry Reeve for the vacant middleweight title, which he won on points.

Then Jim Sullivan, his health now improved, came back into the game and was matched with O'Keefe for the Lonsdale belt. But Sullivan's bad luck had not deserted him and in the third round he broke his hand. But being the courageous fighter he was , he carried on until the end of the twenty rounds only to lose on points.



The fact that he was still on his feet at the end convinced Sullivan that but for the broken hand he would have stopped O'Keefe and won the fight.

During the year 1915-16 Sullivan did little boxing but O'Keefe was kept very busy. He beat Bandsman Blake at the Ring, Blackfriars, in seventeen rounds: Johnny Web in Seven rounds at Liverpool, and Louis Verger (the well known French boxer) in eleven rounds at Belfast.

The Great War had by this time been on for fifteen months. O'Keefe had enlisted in the Army, with Dick Burge the promoter of the Ring. On February 21, 1916 Dick Burge arranged a boxing show at the Golders Green Hippodrome. On the bill were two championship contests, Bombardier Billy Wells v Sgt. Dick Smith, and Sgt Pat O'Keefe v Private Jim Sullivan.

Sullivan had jumped at the chance to meet Pat, whom he was always sure he could beat if his luck held out. But O'Keefe, who had a bad cold when he last fought Sullivan and had difficulty in making the weight, was certain that he too could be able to put up a better show than his last meeting with Sullivan.

O'Keefe went into training at Upper Warlingham and Sullivan got leave from his regiment to train. However, while O'Keefe got wonderfully fit, bad luck was with Sullivan again. A few days before the fight he broke a cartilage in his nose during training, but kept this misfortune quiet.

On the night of the contest it was a full house at the Hippodrome and amongst the crowd were many officers and soldiers as the fight had aroused great interest in the Army. The referee was the well known Gene Corri and in O'Keefe's corner, besides his usual seconds, were Sgt. Ernie Barry, England's champion sculler, and Ted Moore. Sullivan had his brother in law, Charlie Dixon, himself a boxer, and Petty Officer Roche.

It was a cautious first round, each man seeking an opening. O'Keefe was first to break through with a left to Sullivan's face. Sullivan was mainly trying to catch O'Keefe with a right cross, but O'Keefe's clever foot work kept him out of trouble. The exchange continued light until the third round when just before the end O'Keefe caught Sullivan with a straight left to the nose, which opened the cut of the broken cartilage.

In the fourth Sullivan got home with some good left hand punches, but it was plain to see that O'Keefe was punching the harder of the two; he was also punching more often and when the bell rang it was a very weary Sullivan who walked back to his corner.

In the following rounds O'Keefe kept going further ahead. Both men were covered with blood from each other. In the sixteenth round a dramatic change occurred. Both men went into close quarters, O'Keefe scoring at random. O'Keefe then started to show the audience that he could also fight as well as box, when suddenly Sullivan caught him with a smashing right in the chin. O'Keefe staggered,

apparently beaten, Sullivan waded in to finish him off, but was too wild in his deliveries to connect properly. Keeping his head O'Keefe managed to finish the round, but he had a very near escape from a knockout.



The next round they stood toe to toe, and this round was by far the best of the whole contest. Sullivan was hooking and smashing home some tremendous punches, they were both punching each other for all they were worth.

In the 18th round Sullivan started the fresher and stronger, and carried the hardest punches, and it seemed that he had a winning chance. O'Keefe was showing the effect of the punishment he had taken in the sixteenth round and had to rally all his resources to save himself from a decisive defeat. It was a dramatic turn of the tables, and the crowd was quick to appreciate the gallant efforts of the plucky pair.

In the 19th round, and Sullivan is now very reckless in his attempts to knock out O'Keefe, but over and over again O'Keefe's clever ringcraft saved him. Sullivan kept on boxing and smashing punches at him, but O'Keefe's clever blocking of Sullivan's punches saved him from receiving those devastating blows.

The last round came and it was just a matter of whether O'Keefe could last out. But O'Keefe did last out, and Sullivan slammed and hooked O'Keefe all round the ring. It was a thrilling round, with O'Keefe still on his feet when at last the bell came and Gene Corri rightly gave the verdict in favour of O'Keefe. It was a contest that will live long in the memory of those who witnessed it. Sullivan thought he had done enough to have won and would have gladly welcomed another contest.

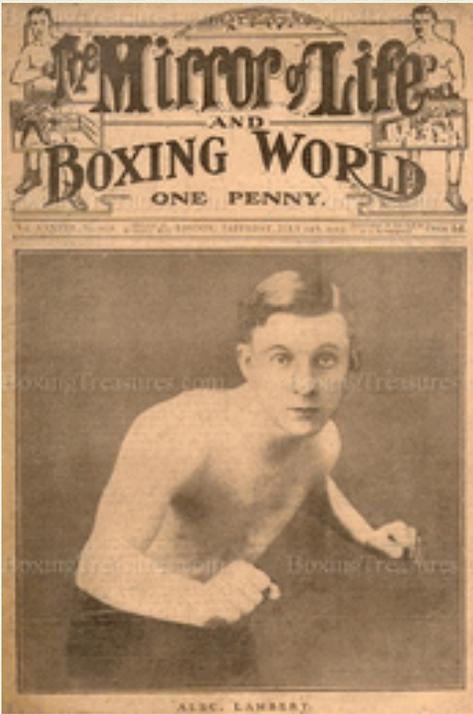
ALEC LAMBERT

(adapted from the original article published in Boxing news 2nd July 1952)

Today, close on four decades since he fought Ted Kid Lewis for the British featherweight championship, Alec Lambert, now 60, is still in the fight game as a trainer. A role where he has gained more fame than he did as a boxer.

Friends intend putting him into a gymnasium directly suitable premises can be found, and pupils who go there will get wise counsel from the little man who claims to have trained more champions than anyone in Britain.

Lambert's fight career began as an amateur in 1909 when he entered, and won, a 9 stone novice competition and a few weeks later, to everyone's astonishment, he became A.B.A. featherweight champion.



But Alec has done many astonishing things. As a professional he boxed a fifteen rounder and twenty rounder on the same evening at the Ring, Blackfriars, and won them both. His opponents were Bill Lewis (Liverpool) and the former amateur champion Charlie Morris (Kilburn).

It was in October 13 that Lambert fought Ted Kid Lewis for the featherweight championship at the National Sporting Club. This is one of his proudest memories, but it is a sore point with him that so many people have been led to believe that he was knocked out by the Kid. " I was knocked down but not out and the referee stopped the fight"

Jim Driscoll the previous featherweight champion relinquished the title so the National Sporting Club decided on eliminators, the eventual winner to meet Lambert. Lewis, then a teen age East Ender won through and he and Lambert were eventually matched for £100 a side.

In his life story Lewis has admitted what a hard fight it was. It went into the seventeenth round before Lambert was declared the loser.

As a trainer Lambert has handled Nel Tarleton, Seaman Watson, Jack Bloomfield, Kid Lewis, Johnny Brown, Phil Scott, Benny Lynch, Harry Corbett and many more, at some time or other.

He also looked after Jack Dempsey when the Manassa Mauler came to do exhibitions and recalls that Dempsey invited him back to the US with him but was unable to accept.

Today most of Alec's relations are in Australia, his father Jimmy Lambert was for many years chief inspector of the British Boxing Board of Control.