



**Name:** Luis Angel Firpo

**Career Record:**

[http://boxrec.com/list\\_bouts.php?human\\_id=010607&cat=boxer](http://boxrec.com/list_bouts.php?human_id=010607&cat=boxer)

**Alias:** El Toro Salvaje de las Pampas

**Nationality:** Argentinian

**Birthplace:** Jun<sup>o</sup>n, Buenos Aires

**Hometown:** Buenos Aires

**Born:** 1894-10-11

**Died:** 1960-08-07

**Age at Death:** 65

**Stance:** Orthodox

**Height:** 6' 2<sup>o</sup>

**Division:** Heavyweight

**Trainers:** [Jimmy DeForrest](#), [Joe Boykin](#), [Fires DeForrest](#)

**Manager:** Himself

### **Career Overview**

Although all but forgotten by casual sports fans in the United States, Luis Angel Firpo remains a cultural icon in his native South America to this

day. There are statues erected in his honor as well as a professional soccer team named after him, all primarily because of a few seconds of glory he experienced in the ring with the legendary [Jack Dempsey](#) in 1923. Strong and powerful, Luis showed little true boxing craft in the ring, but size and brute force was enough to allow him to beat some of the highest ranking heavyweights of the 1920s and establish a permanent legacy as an icon of South American sports.

### **Career Overview**

Although all but forgotten by casual sports fans in the United States, Luis Angel Firpo remains a cultural icon in his native South America to this day. There are statues erected in his honor as well as a professional soccer team named after him, all primarily because of a few seconds of glory he experienced in the ring with the legendary [Jack Dempsey](#) in 1923. Strong and powerful, Luis showed little true boxing craft in the ring, but size and brute force was enough to allow him to beat some of the highest ranking heavyweights of the 1920s and establish a permanent legacy as an icon of South American sports.

### **The Wild Bull**

Firpo's professional boxing career began in 1917 at age 23 in Buenos Aires. In only his second

pro bout he dared to travel to Uruguay and face [Angel Rodriguez](#), undefeated in 24 bouts. Though Rodriguez was a light heavyweight and Firpo weighed more than 220 pounds for the bout, he was easily handled by the more experienced man and did not last through the first round. Firpo's handlers continued to move him along fast, however, and in only his ninth pro fight he was in Santiago, Chile fighting for the heavyweight championship of South America against [Dave Mills](#), who outpointed him over fifteen rounds. That loss was avenged five months later, however, when Firpo knocked Mills out in one round to become the continental champion. Another eight months later, in a third fight, Mills went out in one again. Between February, 1920 and September, 1921, Luis pulled off seven consecutive victories, six by knockout, against various fighters in both Argentina and Chile.

An intelligent man, Firpo was an anomaly in the business side of boxing in that, even when he was at his most successful, he insisted on being his own manager. It was he who decided to move his career to New York in the United States, the Mecca of boxing at the time. His first bout on U.S. soil took place on March 20, 1922 in Newark, New Jersey. His opponent was one Tom Maxted. Maxted, who had only had two previous bouts, was knocked out in the seventh. A couple weeks later Tom McCann, a veteran of a whole one fight, lasted five. But it wasn't Firpo's skill or his opponents that were attracting fans. The press and public were abuzz about Firpo's size. He was a square-shouldered slab of mass who, at over six feet, two inches tall towered above most men of his generation. He drew crowds more as a freak show than as a prize fighter, but audiences loved to gawk at him and he became a draw in the New York area. Thus he came to the attention of Tex Rickard, the foremost promoter in boxing at the time, who looked to cash in on rising interest in the fighter by pitting him against other big names.

On March 12, 1923, Firpo was matched with his first world class heavyweight, former title challenger Bill "K.O." Brennan, a hard-hitting fighter who was also a big draw in New York and had twice fought Dempsey. Though over-the-hill as fighters go, Brennan was still a tough character. Still, Firpo's strength and power proved too much and "K.O." Brennan was K.O.'d himself in the twelfth round. After a quick demolition of overmatched Jim Hibbard in Brooklyn, Firpo was matched with undefeated Jack McAuliffe II at Yankee Stadium. Though McAuliffe was a near novice and Firpo had yet to take on a prime heavyweight contender, the Argentinean sensation (with help from the Rickard promotional machine) still managed to attract an amazing 80,000 fans to watch the fight. In June 1923, Luis knocked two fighters of little significance in two rounds each in a period of one week before returning to New Jersey for his most anticipated fight yet. The genius Rickard had put together a bout between Firpo and Jess Willard, the former heavyweight champion who stood over six and a half feet tall and was attempting a comeback. Rickard billed the fight as the "Battle of the Giants" and hinted to the press that the winner would get a shot at Dempsey's championship.

On July 12, 1923, somewhere between 75,000 and 85,000 people showed up at Boyle's Thirty Acres in Jersey to see these goliaths clash. The younger, hungrier Argentinean, though lacking ring finesse, was the obvious aggressor from the start. He constantly charged Willard, shoving him, wrestling with him, and, most importantly, whacking him with his big right hand. Willard's face was already misshapen and bruised going into the eighth round. When Firpo caught him with a series of heavy shots, culminating with another punishing right, in that round, the ex-champion collapsed onto his hands and knees. Though Big Jess tried to rise, at forty-two years of

age he could not muster the strength. The referee finished his count and Luis Firpo had won the biggest fight yet in his career. Recognizing that Firpo's size would only hold the public imagination for so long, Rickard and was determined to make as much money off of him as quickly as they could. During the late Summer of 1923, Luis fought four times in three weeks, mostly in rural areas where sights like Firpo were unusual enough to create major news. The best of his four opponents was Charley Weinert, an experienced contender, who Luis knocked out in just two rounds in Philadelphia on August 13, 1923.

## **World Class**

Firpo was now a ranked heavyweight contender and the biggest draw in boxing outside of the champion Dempsey himself. For promoter Rickard, a match between this pair was the obvious choice for Dempsey's next title defense. The fight took place on September 14, 1923 at the Polo Grounds in New York, before 80,000 fans privileged enough to see one of the wildest, most fearsome slugfests in the history of championship boxing. The excitement started from the opening bell, as both men charged forward at each other and collided at ring center. With the first body punch landed in the fight, a right hand from Firpo, Dempsey sagged to the floor, his knees briefly touching the canvas. Up before the referee could begin counting, Jack tore into the challenger with a single left hook that sent Firpo crashing to the canvas. The brave challenger rose and fought back but was felled again only seconds later. When Firpo got up from this knockdown too the champion was not discouraged but tore in even more violently, scoring with a left hook to the jaw that produced a third knockdown, with two more soon to follow. Then, as the close of the round neared, Firpo, fighting solely on instinct, rushed the champion back to the ropes. There he landed a monstrous right haymaker that caught Jack in jaw. Senseless, Dempsey fumbled against the ropes limp. With a slight shove from the challenger, Jack went tumbling out of the ring onto the writers' table at ringside. As the referee rushed to the ropes and began his count, the writers helped Dempsey clamber back into the ring. Technically, any help from a non-combatant during the course of a round automatically disqualifies a fighter, but the referee ignored the infraction. Just as Jack made it back into the ring, the fight ended.

Despite Firpo's accomplishing the most astonishing and exciting knockdown in recent decades of boxing history, Dempsey annihilated him in the second round. After two more knockdowns, Firpo could take no more and was counted out while writhing in agony on the floor. Later that night, the Argentinean celebrated his \$156,250 payday by with a massive spaghetti dinner at a New York Italian restaurant.

## **Later Years & Retirement**

Having reached the heights of international acclaim and created front page news the world over, Firpo returned triumphantly to Argentina. Between February and April, 1924 he fought three mediocre opponents in Buenos Aires, winning all of those bouts by knockout. On September 11, 1924, at Boyle's Thirty Acres he fought his first world class opponent since Dempsey in [Harry Wills](#), the consensus number one contender for the title. Firpo, now a rich man thanks to his fighting career and business investments back home, was not properly motivated for the fight and came in outrageously out of shape. The newspapers described the fight as dreadfully boring, a dull affair in which Wills go the better of the action but failed to impress. Because decisions

were still outlawed in New York, the official result, after twelve rounds, was a no-decision. Two months later, in a bout with Charley Weinert, the story was nearly identical. Again Firpo came into the ring displaying nothing resembling fighting shape. After twelve rounds and another no-decision the general idea was that Weinert deserved to win.

His fighting prime clearly passed him, Firpo's private life became a bigger issue in the papers than his professional life. In 1925, religious lawmakers brought charges against Firpo for bringing a married woman from Argentina to the U.S, for "immoral purposes." Additional charges of falsifying details on his immigration papers sealed the deal. Luis preempted deportation by voluntarily returning to Argentina permanently. After a twelve round decision over Italy's Erminio Spalla in Buenos Aires, Luis retired from boxing, focusing instead on his prosperous career as a sports car dealer. A brief comeback in the mid-1930s ended in 1936 with a humiliating loss to the much younger Arturo Godoy. In later life, Luis was a successful rancher. He lived the rest of his life as the most famous man, outside of the Peron Family, in Argentina, died a multi-millionaire on August 7, 1960 at the age of 65.

14 Sept 1923 world title bout with [Jack Dempsey](#) made him a huge world-wide celebrity. The [photograph](#), and a [George Bellows's painting](#), of Firpo knocking Dempsey out of the ring is one of the most famous images in boxing history. After this bout, many aspiring boxers of the 1920s and 1930s adopted the moniker of "Young Firpo." In 1943 Dillon Graham, the Associated Press's Sports Editor, wrote that he had gone through the AP's index card records--which indicated the athletes who had "grabbed" newspaper headlines--for the previous 30 years. The top two sports celebrities over the previous 30 years had been Dempsey and Firpo (ahead of even Babe Ruth). 6 Feb 1943 *Tacoma News Tribune* (Tacoma, WA, USA) wire report.

Even today, a [soccer team](#) is named after him. Incidentally, Firpo had a cousin (some newspaper reports say brother) named Emil Firpo, who became a popular professional wrestler in the United States. (See a photo of him in the 4 April 1930 *Daily Olympian* (Olympia, WA, USA).) According to the 17 July 1928 *Wenatchee Daily World* (Wenatchee, WA, USA), Emil, aged 29 then, was Luis's brother. At this time Emil Firpo was living in Seattle, WA, and wrestling as "Carl Delvos." He had come to the United States seven years earlier, enlisted in the 47th Infantry in 1923 at New York City, and mustered out of the military at nearby Camp Lewis, WA, after 18 months of service. He had engaged in 70 wrestling matches, and lost only four.

### **Dempsey subdues Firpo wild bull of Pampas**

Sept 1923

Beaten to the floor nine times, after he had twice downed the -world's champion, and once knocked him entirely out of the ring, Luis Angel Firpo, the wild bull of Argentine, was counted out in the second round of the most sensational and most savagely fought heavyweight championship contest of all time at the Polo Grounds last night.

Between 85,000 and 100,000 spectators saw the heavyweight crown topple three times from the scowling brow of Jack Dempsey and they saw it grabbed back and set in place three times,

because a champion with a champion's brain did not lose the instinct when his senses departed.

Perhaps no one will ever be able to explain accurately and consecutively what happened in the first round of that sensational fight. It was patterned after that famous first round at Toledo when Dempsey floored the giant Jess Willard seven times.

Willard did not fight back, but Firpo got up seven times and went back to the battle like the wild bull that he has been called. Willard struck hardy a blow in defense, but Firpo lashed out in a frenzy of anger and desperation and three times he did what no other fighter has been able to do since Jack Dempsey became champion. He felled he champion three times.

Three times Firpo was within one punch of the title and its million dollars in assets. Three times he had the champion, punch drunk, weaving around on the ropes, groggy and almost defenseless. Three times with the crown right in his hands, Firpo lacked the technique. to finish it .He lashed out wildly and missed

### **Those misses cost him the championship.**



Dempsey was never nearer to being knocked out in his life He never can come closer than he did and escape. The very first punch of the fight a staggering right that seemed to come up from the floor caught Dempsey on the jaw after he missed a left hook and the champion went to one knee.

Dempsey came up dizzy and he fought the rest of the round as though he were out of his head. He threw cautions to the winds, he abandoned all ideas of defense and tore wildly into the south American . The round developed into the most savage of free handed hitting that has ever been seen.

### **SHOWS GREAT STAMINA**

Showing great stamina and a heart stouter than He had even been thought to posses Dempsey Tore in and turned the tide of battle when 85,000 wild, yelling fans jumped to their feet and prepared to acclaim a new champion.

Under short left and right hooks to the jaw And right hands that threatened to tear his Heart out of his side Firpo went down Seven times in that first round. He came Up each time not covered in defense but lashing Like a wild beast in a jungle fury.

Another tremendous right hand swing caught Dempsey on the jaw and hurled him bodily clear out Of the ring. Dempsey landed on the shoulders Of one of the judges down in the press box.

The count went to nine before the champion Was able to pull himself back into the ring.

Dempsey flung out a crashing left hook and Firpo Went to the floor .the South American rose and flung himself Into the battle and dropped Dempsey to one knee With another right that was flying around like The flanges on a giant fan.

Dempsey was weak kneed and groggy , his corner was panic stricken and from the other side of the ring frenzied instructions were being hurled at Firpo in Spanish. But if Firpo heard he failed to respond.

Jimmy DeForest who trained Dempsey into the title and started Firpo said the the south American could have Won with one short punch while Dempsey was on the ropes, but Firpo, as experts had predicted, lost his head in the heat of battle and did not know how to get over the one punch.

### **DEMPSEY FIGHTS WILD**

Dempsey was so obviously fighting out of his head that he Firpo twice on the jaw with short right hooks after the bell rang. He seemed to know that the round had ended only when the referee across the ring in his corner. The champion always has shown great powers of recuperation and has revived under the treatment of his seconds. He came out cool headed and savage in the second and in 57 seconds of fighting he battered Firpo twice to the floor with a left hook and a right to the jaw that landed almost simultaneously on the target.

The second time Firpo went down he stayed. He was counted out not because his heart failed him, but because he was physically, unable to follow his desire to get up and resume fighting. Firpo was dragged back to his corner and it was almost a minute before he seemed to realize that the fight was over.

### **A SENSATIONAL FIGHT**

No more sensational fight was ever staged. No two heavyweights crowded into less than a round and a third more real fighting than Dempsey and Firpo displayed. Dempsey was thrown clear off the fight that he had planned when he was cracked on the jaw and dropped to his knees by very first punch of the fight, boxing left him, his ideas of science were forgotten and he became a wild fighting man just like Firpo.

The champion beat Firpo at his own game and he retained his title because he punched shorter, more frequently and with more accuracy than the South American. Firpo's dream of becoming the heavyweight champion was only for the time shattered. The huge South American showed that he was *almost* an even match for the champion and they are sure to meet again. Tex Rickard said he would like to match them again next summer, it would be a great fight.

There was nothing in last night's fight designed so produce another million dollar gate. Given one more year and better instructions and Firpo will take the title from Dempsey just as surely as he failed last night. Firpo showed beyond doubt that he was game. He has a great fighting heart

And it is only the lack of experience that caused him to lose. No doubt Dempsey chills a little  
When he thinks of what might have happened if Firpo had Lasted thru the second round.

Because he had never been called upon to show it before, Dempsey also manifested for the first  
the ability to "**take it**" and he took it as no other champion ever did. No other fighter in the  
world could have stood up under the punishment delivered by Firpo.