

The Brief, Bizarre Career of Ralph Fisher

Written by Aaron Tallent

Sunday, 21 August 2005 19:00

Professional boxing is a sport without a best bloopers DVD and it will stay that way for several reasons. For one thing, the sport's strangest moments, like the Jack Dempsey/Gene Tunney long count or Muhammad Ali's phantom punch knockout of Sonny Liston, do not incite laughter, just accusations of corruption. Also, if a boxer makes a mistake, he usually finds himself staring at the ceiling. Knockouts are exciting, but they are not funny.

But all sports, no matter how violent, have their share of wacky moments that, if in the proper context, are probably very humorous. Boxing is no different. Fans and aficionados just have to sift through the annals of history to find them. They must dig up the stories of lesser-known fighters; obscure fighters; guys like Ralph Fisher.

You have probably never heard of Ralph Fisher. His professional boxing career lasted only nine days in the early 1920s and he only faced one opponent, Tommie "Battling" Allen. It is in this short, unexciting career where one of the sport's strangest moments can be found.

Fisher was born in February of 1907 in the town of Thompson, Georgia. When he was a child, his family moved to Atlanta. At that time, boxing was the biggest sport in the country next to horseracing. Many teenagers took up boxing the same way they turn to high school football and basketball today, and Fisher picked up a pair of gloves because it allowed him to stay active and competitive.

He turned professional when he was 16 years old. His first bout with Allen came in Atlanta on December 28, 1923. Fisher was an avid jump-roper, and his footwork was strong enough to earn him a six-round decision against Allen, who was also making his pro debut.

The two faced off again eight days later in Atlanta in another six-round bout. The first five rounds were more of the same as Fisher built a decisive lead. All he had to do was stay away from Allen in the final round to win a decision. If he had, this bout would not be part of boxing folklore.

Instead of coasting to a decision, Fisher decided to trade punches with Allen. In the waning seconds of the sixth, one of Allen's shots sent Fisher to the canvas. The bell sounded with the referee's count at eight and Fisher off of his feet.

The saved-by-the-bell rule, which prevents a referee from continuing a count after a round has ended, is always determined before fights begin by promoters. Obviously, championship fights and other big-time matches do not have this rule, but many preliminary shorter-round bouts do.

The rules of this particular fight allowed for a boxer to be saved by the bell. Had the knockdown occurred in the earlier rounds, the bout probably would have been called. Since it was the last round, the unconscious Fisher, still ahead on all judges' cards, was declared the winner. This makes him the only boxer to ever win a prizefight after being knocked out.

The Brief, Bizarre Career of Ralph Fisher

Written by Aaron Tallent

Sunday, 21 August 2005 19:00

Because of the bizarre nature of the fight and the need to make living, Fisher quit boxing with his “perfect” record intact. He got married and worked as the circulation manager for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* for 32 years. Fisher died of a stroke on August 9, 1977. He and his wife, Nell, never had children.

Not all fighters can etch a prominent place in boxing’s history book. Ralph Fisher has at least earned a footnote for one of the sport’s most bizarre victories.