Six thousand fans were on their feet at the Legion Stadium in Hollywood on April 24th 1942 watching Jack Chase trying to tame Costello Cruz. Cruz was fighting like a “wild man and it’s easy to see why. He had not been defeated as an amateur or professional and no fighter worth his salt lets the vaunted zero go easily.

A loss is rarely just a loss to a fighter. Some, like Cruz, follow a warrior’s code that is as severe as it is ancient. For them a boxing match becomes a demonstration of worthiness and defeat a non-option. The ancient Aztec, like the Zulu, like the Samurai, like the Spartan, was compelled to fight to the bitter or glorious end. They thought nothing of injury and pain, or even death. By defying his humanity, the warrior declares something existential -he declares his worthiness and so proves his worth. Madness? Perhaps, but it is compelling. The next time you hear a fighter say “I’d rather die than lose, or “he’s gonna have to kill me, watch him closely. Such words are not always mere bravado. There are those who mean it.

Cruz did not want to lose.

He would anyway.

The man slinging leather at him also followed the warrior’s code –and this created optimum conditions for a good fight. The victor in these types of engagements is not determined by will because each often cancels out the other. When all is said and done, they are usually determined by skill or luck. Chase showed no hint of being a lucky man, though he had skill to spare.

Cruz was practically out cold on the ropes and was down for a count of four just before the end of the fifth round. As the bell rang for the sixth, he was still wavering in the breeze when Chase came out behind what the *Los Angeles Times* called “a volley of jolting blows. The crowd thought it was all over and began heading for the exits when suddenly Cruz “unleashed a vicious attack, sending Chase running for cover -and the crowd running back to their seats. Chase pounded out a victory and with that, set off the first rumblings of a West Coast reputation.

Big Boy Hogue was in his way. Hogue was a grinding type of fighter who joined his twin brother Shorty as gatekeepers of the middleweight division. Chase kept Hogue at bay behind a high-speed jab and dropped him for a nine count in the third round. Then he switched from left to right and cut his eye. Hogue managed to bore inside and land enough short punches to score a flash knockdown. Chase took the decision. After beating Bobby Birch twice in a row, he would reduce Tabby Romero to a bloody mess and win every round. By November, Chase had been a headliner on six cards at the Legion Stadium in Hollywood and sold it out every time.

There was talk that he was ready for Henry Armstrong himself.

Then he faced *The Ring* magazine's number one middleweight contender, Archie Moore.

The "Old Mongoose wasn't old when Chase met him. He was entering his prime. Moore had dropped anchor in San Diego after an Australian tour and was already an established ring general. But he did not feel so secure. He had recently undergone emergency surgery and pundits and other fighters looked at that cauterized scar on his abdomen and saw an invitation. "I practiced very hard at picking off left hooks to my body, Moore said, "as everybody in the fight game knew about my operation and would be shooting for that weak spot. He was punching harder now and had just cleanly knocked out Romero six rounds earlier than Chase. He then went after Chase himself to prove that he was back at full power. "If they can't buy you after spoiling his twenty-two straight wins, his manager said, "they never will!

News coverage of the bout was as terse as the bout itself. "Winning convincingly, the Associated Press reported, "Archie Moore, San Diego middleweight, tonight handed Jack Chase a 10-round lacing.

All told, Chase would fight Moore in six roaring battles. You can bet that Chase was winging left hooks at that weak spot until his arm looked like a shepherd's crook. In the second match, they fought at Lane Field in San Diego under an angry sun. Moore remembered a trick that he learned from the old-timers and maneuvered Chase into its glare. Even so, Chase was tougher that time out, dropping Moore for a nine count despite the sun in his eyes and despite the fact that both those eyes would be closed by the fifteenth round. The third match was a different story altogether. "Chase was a good fighter, Moore remembered, "and by this time he was able to figure out my style. Chase took eleven of fifteen rounds. Eddie Muller of the *San Francisco Examiner* could barely contain his admiration:

"We can't recall when we saw two fighters as near to perfection as were Chase and Moore. They know what boxing gloves were made for. In clinches they didn't bang away with reckless abandon; if they found an opening they punched; if the opening wasn't there, they tried to make one.

The spindly legs of Chase were particularly impressive. Muller watched him negotiate around the ring "with the grace and ease of a ballet dancer, every move "a picture.

Moore made $500 dollars in losing to Chase. After deductions, he was left with far less. "Here I was piddling around against tough competition, he complained, while stars like Sugar Ray Robinson were making 200 times that amount against competition that looked like pickpockets next to Murderers' Row.

mURdEreRs' RoW

Bookie Jimmy Ryan had a favorite fighter. He'd typically lay 3 to 1 odds on San Francisco's Eddie Booker. However, a few days before Booker was scheduled to face a rising Jack Chase, Ryan wasn't so sure. He had taken an anonymous jaunt to the gym where Chase was training and came out concerned. He'll be "no cinch, he said, "The guy handles himself like he knows what it's all about. The fight was scheduled for fifteen rounds and was California's first

‘marathon bout’ in thirty years. It was for the State Middleweight Title. Booker had a sterling record of 61-3-8. Chase was fresh off a month-long break and was ready to begin yet another year with an exclamation point. Now residing in San Francisco, he could walk to the Civic Auditorium from his apartment.

A crusty old manager from the 1920s sat next to Eddie Muller at ringside and watched a clinic. “I’ve been watching ‘em for a long time, he told the reporter, “but this Chase really showed me class. He’s a thinker. He makes moves for a purpose. Chase’s manager knew this already. He threw down $200 at 1 to 3 odds and cleaned up. Booker took only four of the fifteen rounds.

As he walked home, Jack Chase carried another state title with him. Fans began filling seats to see the fuss. No less than Governor Earl Warren, future Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, came out for one of his fights and sat in the press section. The victory over the dreaded Eddie Booker was among the most remarkable achievements of Chase’s career but Booker only presented the opening argument. If Murderers’ Row had a chief justice, it would have been Charley Burley.

Burley’s style was as complex as tax law. His uncanny sense of timing and distance allowed him to throw shots at blind spots, and he was intelligent enough to lull his opponent into a false sense of security and then do irreparable harm. He would often enhance his leverage by leaping into his shots, and the force of delivery was enough to anesthetize anyone, including full-blown heavyweights.

Chase stood in the corner across from Burley one month, two fights, and one tonsillectomy after defeating Booker. He was still recuperating on the night of February 19th. No one remembered the last time Chase had been knocked out but when Burley slung a right cross in the second round, he went down like it was yesterday. He had the grit to stand up as the count reached nine and then returned the favor in the fourth by knocking Burley down. Over the next six rounds, Burley blasted away and Chase’s lights were flickering and dimming so much he probably thought a prankster was in the Legion Stadium. He lost the decision, though finishing on his feet in a fight like that against a force like that was no small victory by itself.

In the summer of 1943, Chase faced Aaron “Tiger Wade. Wade was a chunky and powerful fighter with a vicious left hook. He was “feared, according to insiders, “by most of the so-called topnotchers. Even Burley resorted to being cute with him –hopping on a unicycle to take a close decision. Boxing fans on the lively coast were in for a surprise. Back in 1936, when Chase was fighting as Young Joe Louis against George Black and Eddie Murdock, he gave away the first three rounds. The same thing happened here. Like a baseball player watching the first pitch sail over home plate, Chase took his time making calculations and then adapted accordingly. What he came up with was almost counterintuitive. He went inside with “short, jolting blows against a stronger man and dominated that range and the fight.

The box office at the aptly-named Coliseum Bowl opened at 11am on the day before Chase met Lloyd Marshall. Back in 1934 and 1935 while Chase was cooling off in the clink, Marshall was winning two Golden Gloves championships in Cleveland and by this time, he had defeated Charley Burley and punched Costello Cruz loose from his warrior’s code.

The early betting said even money.

The day of the fight saw the odds tilt toward Chase at 10 to 8, which was unsurprising due to his well-publicized recent accomplishments. This was before television. It was an era when watching a fight meant leaving the house and buying a ticket. Gamblers like their eyes. They trust them. Given that, the betting public will pick a fresh and local plum over a rumor of the same. They go for what they know. But in the next morning's paper, "Mr. Boxing himself, the omniscient Eddie Muller, came out in favor of Marshall. He predicted that the larger man's "harder punching and "ability to fight at close quarters would make the difference. Those statements circulated and the betting public perked up –it was Marshall who entered the ring the favorite at 10 to 7 odds. This goes to show that a fresh and local plum is not picked when a veteran grocer speaks against it.

Muller should've picked both plums.

Fans in the San Francisco Bay Area said that Chase-Marshall I was "one of the greatest middleweight fights ever fought here.

Two minutes into the first round, Marshall threw a long left hook that caught Chase and sent him sliding across the canvas on his back. Chase jumped up without a count, grabbed a red cape and became a matador. He immediately deferred to the power of Marshall and stayed away while jabbing. In the fourth round, he got caught again with a left hook, and Marshall followed this one with a right cross. Chase spun into the ropes of his own corner, bounced off and sagged down. Seven seconds later he got up. Marshall proceeded to demonstrate how well-rounded he was by outjabbing and outboxing the sleeker Chase from rounds five through nine. Chase fell behind and then began fighting more aggressively. In the ninth round, he was moving again and outclassed Marshall who was beginning to tire. In the fourteenth round, Marshall turned on the heat and connected with a right cross and left hook that landed "wrist deep into the title holder's stomach. Two uppercuts later Chase was "dazed and bewildered.

"Then, Muller tells us, "out of clear sky Chase let fly in desperation with a left hook which landed on Marshall's jaw and sat him down near the ropes for a count of nine. Chase finished strong enough to take the last round and the fight was declared a draw. "He's a good fighter and a smart one, Marshall admitted afterwards.

The build-up to the rematch was easy because fans in both camps disputed the draw. They didn't have to wait long for a resolution. The rematch was held only a month later and would pull in a whopping $17,753 and fifteen cents. On the undercard was a heavyweight named Clarence Brown, a protégé of former heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. When Brown was given a dubious decision over someone named Bob Smith, the crowd jeered. Johnson, now 65, moved to center ring and did a shadow boxing routine to lighten things up. It went over like a lead balloon.

Chase-Marshall II picked up where it left off –in a hurry.

Chase was the aggressor this time around, while Marshall, despite claims that he was in better

condition for this bout, seemed puzzled. Chase was leading alternately with both hands and was digging short shots inside. Despite their eyes, the gamblers were betting 10 to 7 on the wrong man right up until the sixth round. In the ninth round, both fighters met in the middle for an exchange that lasted for a full thirty seconds as the screaming crowd rose to its feet. Chase took command at the end of the exchange with his jab and stayed in that posture for the rest of the fight.

In the last two minutes of the eleventh round he “cuffed Lloyd around with little reciprocation. In the thirteenth, he did “a paint job on Marshall. In the fourteenth, it was “target practice. In the last round, Chase gave him “a thorough going-over.

A humbled Muller admitted that Chase outpointed Marshall with “ridiculous ease.

Eddie Booker. Charley Burley. Aaron “Tiger Wade. Lloyd Marshall. The annals of boxing history have lifted a purple curtain on these fighters. Along with Holman Williams, Bert Lytell, Cocoa Kid, and Jack Chase himself, they’re eight fingers in the black fists of Murderers’ Row. Years after the last of them faded away, Jim Murray remembered them as “the most exclusive men’s club the ring has ever known. They were so good and so feared, he wrote, that they had to have their own tournament. All of them lost now and then but that’s all right -America likes scars. She pins medals on them. Travel to the opposite end of the world and the very idea of struggle is beautified. You can drop a vase in Japan and they’ll fill the cracks with gold. Murderers’ Row had tarnished records, Murray snapped, “because they tarnished each others!

They exalted each others.

Burley beat Chase. Marshall beat Burley. Chase drew with Marshall. Booker beat Marshall. Chase beat Booker, then beat Marshall in a rematch. Fans were almost guaranteed a doozy when these men clashed. Murderers’ Row, Murray wrote, “put on better fights in tank towns than champions did in Yankee Stadium.

As history rang the final bell on 1943, twenty-nine year old Jack Chase held a victory over two International Boxing Hall of Fame fighters and was the second-ranked middleweight on the planet.

Was he proud?

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Photograph courtesy of Harry Otty.

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