

Sport Talk

by Ron Sykes, Sports Editor

The March 15 fight between champion Larry Holmes and challenger Jerry Cooney will undoubtedly be the richest boxing event in history. Holmes reportedly will receive between 10-15 million dollars, and all this for a fight that is expected to last less than six rounds.

We would be terribly remiss if we failed to mention that the reason for such a big purse is that the match is a classic Black-White confrontation.

Boxing for the Black man has run the gamut. In the early days of boxing, the heavyweights were ruled by Caucasians. From the beginning, boxing was a sport that attracted athletes from society's lower echelons. The heavyweight ranks were dominated by the Irish, the Italians and other poor immigrants who were seeking avenues to a better life.

Blacks were denied this opportunity due to the discrimination policies of that era. During the early 1890s to the early 1900s, entertainment was the only profession in which Blacks were allowed to participate, and there were no big bucks available.

Jack Johnson was the first Black heavyweight champion. He was immediately a role model in the Black community. Because of his lifestyle, Jack Johnson was hated by many whites. He lived high and fast. He dressed flashy, drove big cars and

married a white woman. He made big money and spent big money and was the envy of many Americans, Black and white.

Jack Johnson's marriage to a white woman caused him to lose the vast majority of his white supporters, forcing Jack to flee the country and resume his career abroad. What Jack left here was thousands of young Blacks taking to the boxing gyms around the country in search of the elusive American dream.

Boxing was the first sport open to Blacks and through the depression years they came to dominate the sport.

Blacks dominate from the light-weight division to the heavyweights. Such great fighters as Henry Armstrong, Sandy Saddler, Sugar Ray Robinson, Kid Gavilan, and the late, great, Joe Louis were a few of the greats who emerged as champions.

Armstrong was the first man ever to hold titles in three weight divisions: welterweight, middleweight and light-heavyweight. During that time Armstrong was rated as the top boxer in the world, pound-per-pound.

Sandy Saddler dominated the featherweights and fought some of his greatest battles against Willie Pep, the white ex-champion in that weight division. The Saddler-Pep fights were on the same level as the Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier thrill-

ers.

Sugar Ray Robinson and Kid Gavilan were the top welterweights of the early '50s. Sugar Ray emerged as the greatest fighter pound-per-pound in the game at the time. Robinson won titles as welterweight, middleweight and only the heat kept him from obtaining the light-heavyweight crown. Robinson was far ahead of champion Joey Maxim when the 115-degree heat caused him to collapse in his corner. He could not answer the bell for the 13th round. On that same hot summer evening in New York, referee Ruby Goldstein also collapsed during the 8th round and a substitute had to be called in.

When the Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson, baseball was then opened to the Black man. Many of the young athletes that would have gone into boxing were now finding a more glamorous life in baseball. This led to the slow demise of boxing for Blacks.

Soon after baseball, the NBA opened its doors to the Black athletes. This led to the further demise of boxing for the Black man.

During the 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement opened doors for Blacks into all professions the brutal sport of boxing was no longer glamorous to the Black man. Instead of turning to the gym, they turned to the universities and colleges of the world. When the Blacks no longer needed boxing for a living, the fight

game abruptly turned to the Latinos, who then began to dominate the lower weight divisions just as the Blacks once had.

Most Blacks stayed away from boxing. They diverted their energies to the NFL, NBA, and major league baseball.

The 1976 Olympic boxing team is credited with bringing the Black athlete back into boxing. At a time when Watergate had drained the spirits of our nation and Americans needed something to be proud of, along came this great Olympic team, dominated by young Blacks. But the nation cheered the young Blacks who represented our country so well. Amateur boxing has long been dominated by European and Soviet-bloc countries. But this team—Leo Randolph, Howard Davis, Davey Armstrong, Leon Spinks, Michael Spinks and Captain Sugar Ray Leonard—won the hearts of America as they battled their way to become Olympic champions. These young heroes were seen daily in the homes of two hundred million Americans and all of them were later to become professionals with the exception of Howard Davis and Davey Armstrong. Davis did fight for a championship and Armstrong delayed his professional debut to try for the 1980 Olympics which then-President Jimmy Carter was later to boycott. What Sugar Ray Leonard did, we all know.

Dream Team selected

The San Francisco Giants all-time "Dream Team" was announced Jan. 27 at a special screening of the Giants 25th Anniversary film in San Francisco. Led by Willie Mays, the "Dream Team" features four current members of the Giants greats. Current manager Frank Robinson, was named to pilot the historic team.

The "Dream Team" was selected from more than 20,000 ballots cast by Giants fans last season. Mays was the leading vote getter with 13,621, followed by Willie McCovey with 12,399 and Tom Haller with 10,605.

The members of the "Dream Team" in alphabetical order are: Jack Clark, Jim Davenport, Tito Fuentes, Tom Haller, Al Holland, Johnnie Lemaster, Juan Marichal, Gary Matthews, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Stu Miller and Frank Robinson.

"Dream Team" members will participate in an Old Timers game at Candlestick Park on July 17 and will be featured in a variety of team promotions and special events this year.

Philadelphia's 76ers may have their "Doctor" but the Grambling State Tiger basketball players boast of 6-4 guard Kenneth Simpson as the "Doctor."

During his prep days Simpson was often referred to as the "Legend."

Legend or not... People from the SWAL think he's something special.

Simpson is GSU's leading scorer so far with a 17.5 average. He's averaging 11.5 boards a game, while shooting 58 per cent from the floor. And as a junior he led the conference in both steals and assists. The high flying southpaw is expected to go high in this year's NBA draft.

Game of the Week

Prep game of the week—Marshall 70, Jefferson 60. The Minutemen captured the first half championship by downing the Democrats on their home court in overtime. Marshall led throughout the contest, but the Demos managed to gain a 56-56 tie with 26 seconds left in regulation. The game was marked by numerous turnovers by both sides. This wasn't the usual Bobby Harris coached Jefferson team that has shown us so much discipline in the past. Jefferson dug their own grave by repeatedly putting up difficult twenty-footers. Marshall buried them at the other end by driving in for easy layups.

Portland Observer Top Twenty

1. Virginia
2. North Carolina
3. DePaul
4. Iowa
5. Minnesota
6. Missouri
7. Oregon State
8. Georgetown
9. Kentucky
10. Tulsa
11. U. San Francisco
12. Idaho
13. Arkansas
14. Wake Forest
15. Fresno State
16. Tennessee
17. Memphis State
18. Alabama
19. Kansas State
20. Texas



Give it a little more oomph, Kelvin!

NFL players, owners battle

The NFL Players Association and the owners are on a collision course again. The players are asking that 55 per cent of the profits of each team go to the players fund for salaries. The owners say the players are asking for too much and that they would never consider that proposal.

Can they come to an agreement? Will the players, like the baseball union, strike? Who will win in this battle? *Observer Sports* will keep you posted on the events of this fight. Read *Observer Sports* for the best in Sport coverage.

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