

Sidelights On The Boxing Question

How Misguided Public Opinion is Doing a Justly Popular Sport a Good Deal of Damage.

By DICK WINFIELD

Boxing is too great a sport to yield without a struggle to any outburst of popular hostility. The Baseball Magazine is not interested in the roped arena any more than it is interested in other forms of athletic sport. But it does like to see fair play, no matter whether boxing or some other more important matter be at issue, and the present general outcry directed toward this ancient and long popular sport is so entirely biased and distorted as to merit general condemnation.

THE conduct of New York State is generally a determining factor in the conduct of the nation. In view of this leadership of the Empire State, the attitude toward boxing as shown in Greater New York or Albany is particularly impressive. This is all the more important since the widespread movement in these cities which alleges as its aim the reorganization of boxing and its elevation to a higher plane among the nation's sports seems to veil an attack upon the existence of the sport itself.

While THE BASEBALL MAGAZINE is not directly concerned with the prosperity of boxing any more than it is with the welfare of any other healthful sport, it does view with a good deal of disfavor the very evident hostility of certain elements of the community whose endeavor seems to be to destroy utterly a pastime which is as deservedly popular as it is ancient. Any movement whose honest intention is to better conditions in boxing must meet with the approval and win the support of every enlightened influence in the community. But the theory that because a sport has some objectionable features it is therefore entirely objectionable, lacks logic.

Lately one or two of the great New York dailies have joined the crusade against boxing. If these dailies confined their efforts to the very evident evils of

boxing, they would be doing a real public service. But their motive seems to be to distort these evils and make boxing wholly bad. They appeal or endeavor to appeal to that hysterical part of the community which in a well-meaning but misguided way is always quite willing to annihilate something it wholly fails to understand.

Many boxers are men of small intelligence and no character. The same could be said of baseball players forty years ago, but baseball has become revolutionized in recent years, and it now attracts to its ranks the best type of American athletes. The regeneration of boxing has not been so thorough, but it has been sufficiently marked to give the utmost encouragement to those who see a great future for this most direct and primitive of sports.

No one in justice could say that Kilbane or Gibbons or Bombardier Wells or Young Jack O'Brien or a hundred other well-known boxers are anything else than intelligent and desirable citizens. The days when a boxer was a rowdy are as surely passing as that similar episode in the life of the National Game. With the co-operation of the public and the press and the proper oversight, not hostility, of the government, boxing might speedily be robbed of its present objectionable features and placed upon as high a plane as any other well-accredited sport.

All the cant about the brutality of boxing is unworthy of any consideration. As a matter of fact, the whole object of a boxer is by the command of all his skill and science to vanquish his opponent. In order to do this, he lands as many blows as possible where they have the most effect. He lands them on a man who is a skilled athlete, who usually feels them but little and who, even though he is completely knocked out, is almost never injured.

In a football contest exactly the same system is carried out, only there are eleven men on a side instead of one. The avowed intention of a football team is to concentrate on the weakest points of its opposition and cripple them if possible. Where a boxer aims at another man's jaw, a football team aims perhaps at their opponent's tackle or whatever may appear the weakest part of the line, and while the damage in a boxing contest is limited to a few inconsiderable bruises with hardly possible danger, in football there are numberless bruises and a very real danger.

The talk that boxing is a barbarous exhibition of bloodshed is absolutely foolish. A boxer may in the course of a contest get a cut lip or a nose bleed or a few other minor injuries, but even if he is knocked out completely he is very speedily revived and shows generally little signs of the contest.

In football there is always far more real bloodshed, for there are far more men engaged, while in addition to many serious injuries, such as broken arms and legs, there are also annually a number of deaths. Boxing is one of the least dangerous of games, less so than baseball or any other great national pastime. As for its brutality, there is nothing more brutal in seeing two men who are skilled boxers engaged in a contest than to see twenty-two men piled together in the center of a field in what to the average spectator has much the appearance of a rough and tumble fight.

The argument that a boxing match brings out all the undesirable elements of the community applies no more to boxing than to any other pastime. The undesirable elements of the community go to baseball games and football games, for the undesirable elements of the com-

munity, just like the desirable elements of the community, are interested in athletic sport. Pickpockets go to boxing matches, as is alleged. They go also to temperance lectures and even to church. They go wherever there is a crowd. It matters nothing to them what cause has attracted that crowd.

Boxing is a primitive athletic contest. It appeals to all men who are in the least degree interested in athletic sport. Millions of people play amateur baseball and go to see professional baseball. There is no more objection to having professional boxers than there is to having professional baseball players.

Boxing should be strongly regulated by law. Every effort should be made to discourage rowdyism in boxing and to expel all boxers who are guilty of unsportsmanlike conduct. The State should always maintain a supervision of boxing and the press and the community alike should unite in bettering its tone. But to abolish a good, legitimate sport simply because it has some defects is to trespass on common sense.

Boxing is a great game. It has all the inherent elements of a great game. It has always been popular and it always will be popular. Rabid appeals for partisan purposes to that well-intentioned but misguided part of the community who are always looking for something to abolish may temporarily embarrass boxing, but can never do it any serious injury.

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The recent act of the Federal Government restricting the exhibition of moving picture films of boxing bouts is a blow at the publicity of the game. Like many acts of law, in accomplishing indirect good it does direct damage. As moving pictures attract hundreds of thousands of children, it may be advisable to prohibit exhibitions of boxing, but inasmuch as films of this kind are often displayed in theatres attended mainly by adults who are naturally and properly interested in such an exhibition, it does seem that another solution of the difficulty might have been attended by less drastic means than absolute abolition.

It seems unjust on the face of it to prevent a man in Pennsylvania from see-

ing moving pictures of a fight which it is perfectly lawful for a man in New York to attend.

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One of the greatest needs of boxing is a national commission which shall have at least some measure of authority in regulating the sport. One of the first acts of this commission should be to supervise the claims of champions and see that they conduct themselves in a way which becomes a champion. The right to sidestep a difficult contest seems wholly in the hands of the champions at present. Where a rival has demonstrated his ability and proved by his record to have earned a match, and is still refused a meeting by the champion, this commission should have the authority after a reasonable length of time to declare the championship forfeited. The public is heartily tired of the sidestepping of difficult matches by the title holders, and there seems no present way of dealing with the difficulty save by an arbitrary

act on the part of a public commission which could enforce a reasonable line of conduct upon these somewhat exalted gentlemen.

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The exorbitant demands of certain boxers who seem to think they are entitled to a fortune every time they consent to give a stalling exhibition for ten rounds or so are sufficient to excite the disgust of all true lovers of the sport. In these days of professionalism in all lines of athletics any star who has won a reputation is entitled to a liberal compensation for his services. Nor would there oftentimes be so much criticism of the exorbitant demands of certain boxers if in addition to charging more than they are worth these boxers did not also seem disposed to give as little as possible in return for the money they receive. The hand of a national boxing commission would be justly in evidence in straightening out some of these present tangles which are doing so much to injure the sport.

