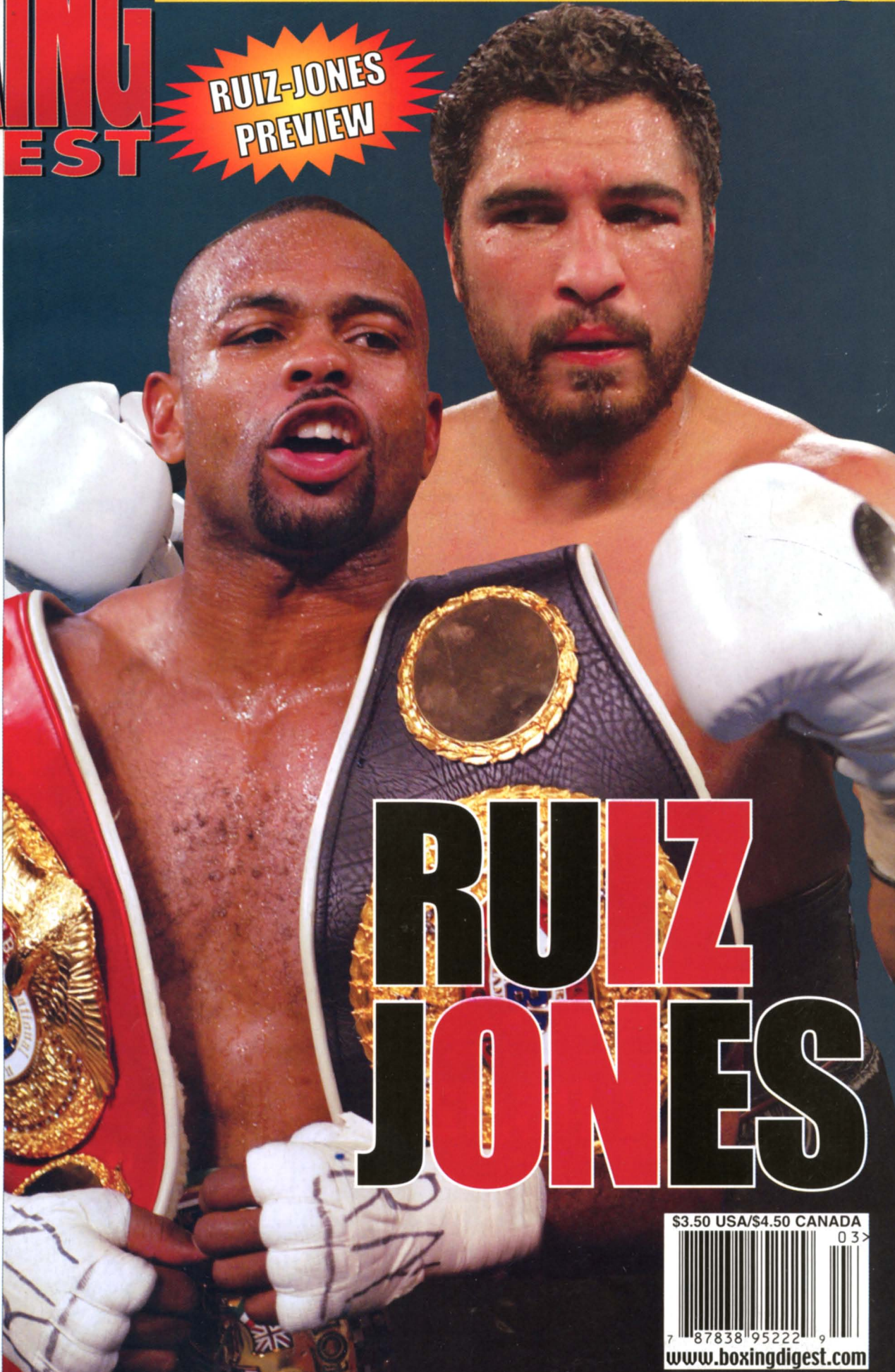


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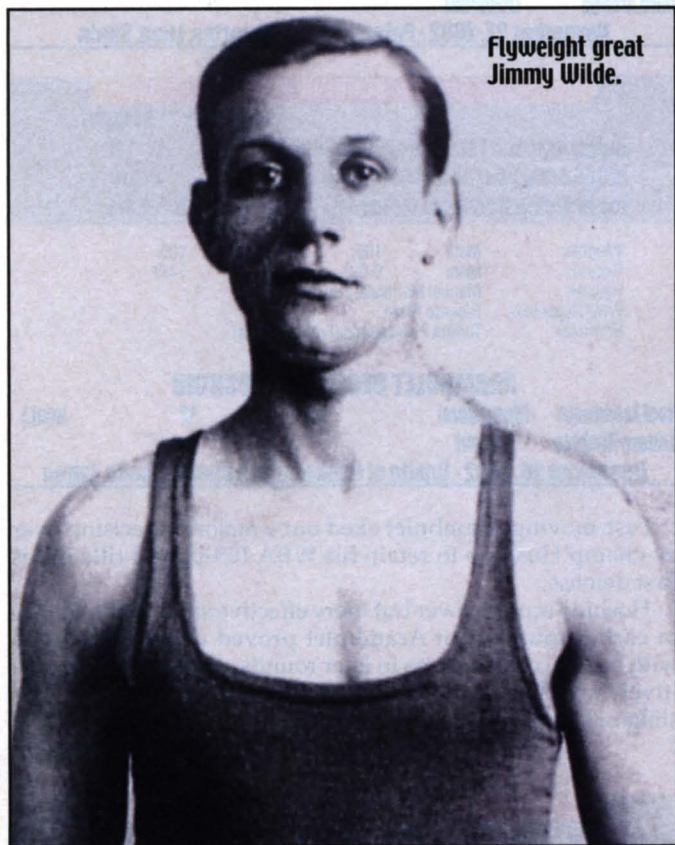


# SHORT JABS: BO MINI STORIES

## THE FLYWEIGHTS— BOXING'S UNSUNG MEN

by Alan Shelton

There is a mystique about the heavyweight champion of the world, not a specific individual but the title itself. As a good big man will usually defeat a good little man than it stands to reason the largest division produces a man who is not only the master of the contenders of his own class, but is boss of the entire fistic world. Yet, a heavyweight champion stands supreme because of size not necessarily pound for pound ability. Indeed the cream of fistic talent has historically emerged from the mid-level divisions; lightweight, welterweight and middleweight. Rare have been the periods in boxing history in which there were a number of top-flight heavyweights competing at once. Two periods that come to mind are the turn of the 20th Century when outstanding boxers like Corbett, Fitzsimmons, Jeffries, Tom Sharkey and Joe Choyniski did battle. Closer to home are the 1970s when such gifted fighters as Ali, Frazier, Foreman, Quarry, Norton, Lyle and Shavers among others traded leather. Yet even given the



Flyweight great  
Jimmy Wilde.

lack of quality in much of heavyweight history it commands attention because of physical stature. This fixation with size produces a reaction in the other direction. Just as science demonstrates that for every action there is a totally opposite reaction, the popularity with the big men results in a lack of interest among the small men - the flyweights.

It's a shame, for the division has produced some outstanding fighters. The youngest of the eight traditional weight divisions, the class was created in England in 1910 with an ini-



Pancho Ulla watches Jimmy Wilde weigh-in for their world flyweight championship match in New York City.

tial weight limit of 108 lbs. (the bantamweight class which dates to the 19th century had an original limit of 105 lbs.) with the first champion being crowned in 1913 when Sid Smith

## MAKE ME A MATCH by Marc Lichtenfeld

"Matchmaker, Matchmaker,  
Make me a match,  
Find me a find,  
catch me a catch  
Matchmaker, Matchmaker  
Look through your book,  
And make me a perfect match"  
- From the show *Fiddler on the Roof*



CKP's Eric Bottjer

In the show *Fiddler on the Roof*, Hodel and Chava dream that the town matchmaker will find them husbands and then they will live happily ever after. In boxing, matchmakers utilize similar talents as the ones in the play, but with decidedly different results.

Just how does one become a matchmaker? A recent check of some of this nation's institutions of higher learning revealed not a single course in Matchmaking 101.

All matchmakers interviewed for this article agreed on one prerequisite for the job—a love of boxing. Bruce Trampler of Top Rank was a precocious freshman in college when he became middleweight Billy Douglas' manager. From there he met various people in the industry and one thing led to another. Carl Moretti, matchmaker for Main Events, worked in public relations for Madison Square Garden Boxing. Moretti was given increased responsibility and allowed to make matches for the four and six rounders. Once he proved capable, the assistant matchmaker lost the "assistant" title.

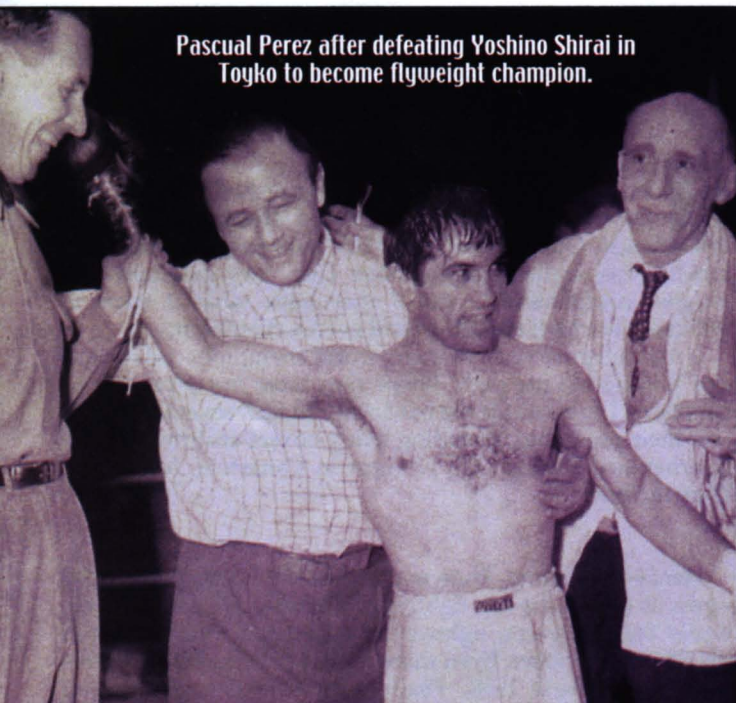
### The Job

Matchmaking is not simply creating dream match-ups. If it was, every boxing fan that has wondered, "what if," would be qualified. Making matches also requires the ability to negotiate contracts, and most of all, having reliable industry sources.

Most matchmakers follow the sport very carefully and are aware of boxers' histories and recent performances. But they also rely heavily on others to give them honest appraisals of how a particular boxer looks in the ring or the gym.



Pascual Perez after defeating Yoshino Shirai in Toyko to become flyweight champion.



scored a 20 round decision over Eugene Criqui in London.

The next dozen years would see the division (which would eventually move up to 112 lbs.) dominated by British boxers.

Even a casual boxing fan will notice that most fights consist of a "house" fighter - one who is either local or with the promoter putting on the show, versus an "opponent." Picking the opponent is where the matchmaker's skills come into play.

Eric Bottjer of Cedric Kushner Promotions relayed a story about how Joey DeGrandis was selected as the opponent for Virgil Hill in November. Hill's manager paid CKP to put on the show, which was to be televised nationally. According to Bottjer, "Virgil Hill's manager doesn't want to spend \$50,000 to bring a show to Hill's hometown, to get him beat. To be blunt, he doesn't want a 50-50 fight. On the other hand he's smart enough to realize that the fight is on TV. It has to be competitive. There has to be some sort of intrigue to it for someone to tune in and watch. So you have to find a balance."

Hill pitched a shutout and won a twelve round decision.

Bottjer estimates that 80% of the bouts are made under similar circumstances. "It would be nice if they were all 50-50, but how's a guy like De La Hoya going to fight evenly matched fights every time? It's impossible, especially early in a guy's career."

Carl Moretti said his job consists primarily of finding bouts and the proper opposition for the twenty-three boxers who fight under the Main Events banner.

Not that he's complaining, but Golden Boy Promotions' Eric Gomez said matchmaking is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week job. You have to be on top of everything. The shows off TV, the televised shows, know who won, know the names, know the styles."

San Francisco based promoter Peter Howes has a reputation for putting on evenly matched, exciting cards. He often handles the matchmaking duties himself. For a recent show that featured a bout for the California State Heavyweight Title, Howes traveled to Los Angeles to watch the two main event fighters in the gym and make sure they were as good as he had heard. "Charles Wilson's mother told me that he's ready to fight and that her boy was going to come home with that belt. Little things like that mean something. They're indications that someone is not coming in just to collect a paycheck."

Howes intuition was correct as Wilson defeated previously unbeaten Javier Mora in a thrilling slugfest.

The best of them emerged from the coal mines of his native Wales to become the greatest fighter the division has ever seen.

Jimmy Wilde stood 5' 2 1/2" and sometimes scaled less than 100 lbs., yet that small body contained explosive power. Coupled with a hard to hit, weaving style, led to such nicknames as "The Mighty Atom" and "The Ghost With A Hammer." As the late British boxing writer and historian Gilbert Odd once wrote, "it is no exaggeration to say that little Jimmy Wilde was the greatest flyweight of all time and it is doubtful whether there will ever be another like him, because apart from being a physical freak, he was also a phenomenal fighter." Wilde reigned between 1916-1923.

The man who relieved Wilde of the title was no slouch himself. Philippine born boxer Pancho Villa lacked Wilde's punching power but made up for it with a whirlwind, never say die style. As one boxing historian noted: "...the vicious rip-snorting boxer who could go 15 rounds at blinding speed and finish as fresh as when he started." This was vintage Villa, a perpetual punching machine with seemingly limitless stamina. "Styles make fights" as the adage states and the poised skillful boxing of Frankie Genaro proved a style Villa could not solve. After losing to Genaro before his defeat of Wilde, Villa refused to meet his erstwhile conqueror and the two men never met for the world crown. After Villa's untimely death in 1925 at age 24, Genaro met Fidel LaBarba for the American flyweight title. LaBarba had won the gold medal for the United States in the 1924 Olympics and thus had less than one year of experience as a professional. Yet in this meet-

### Putting out Fires

Matchmakers could also be called firefighters. It seems that a significant portion of their jobs is dealing with the unexpected, which they now have come to expect.

CKP's Bottjer said one of his biggest challenges is dealing with irresponsible people in the industry, which are all too common. "In football, you know on Sunday the 49ers and the Broncos are going to play. In boxing, until you see the guys in the ring, you can't be sure they'll show up or not."

Moretti fully understands that cancellations are part of the business. He described a recent card that appeared cursed from the beginning. "We had four ticket sellers on the card for an eight bout show. All four fell through. One guy got meningitis, one broke his hand, and another had a fight with his girlfriend and stayed away from the gym. It was mix and match for two weeks. We couldn't wait to get it over with."

Howes of Howes Entertainment, estimates at least a 20% drop out rate on every card in boxing.

Golden Boy's Eric Gomez once had a boxer bolt from the weigh-in. Without a word, he jumped in his car and took off. His terrifying opponent had a record of 0-1.

### Labor of Love

It is apparent that these capable men could make good livings in another line of work if they desired. But despite the aggravation, it seems there's nothing they'd rather do. The matchmakers were unanimous in agreement that the best part of their job is when a fight comes off as planned and the fans get their money's worth. However, if you're thinking of becoming a matchmaker, make sure you have good health insurance. The stress is enormous. Gomez said one matchmaker asked him if he had heart bypass surgery yet. "When I told him no, he said, 'you will. We all do.'"

Hopefully, their skills at spotting talent will help them choose a good doctor, so they can get back to doing what they love, making good matches.

If only Hodel and Chava had these guys in their corner, they'd be married to rich doctors by now.