

A Memorable Three Minutes

It was the largest in southeast Pittsburgh, a sleazy place.

Boys and young men gathered here, put on boxing gloves, punched a bag, lifted weights, fought a few rounds, got a shower, bragged and showed off.

And it was home for Harry Greb, a local toughie intent on being more than a contender. He had the build, determination, ruthlessness of a great boxer, and this talented local trainer. Whatever confidence Greb lacked, the gym-owner/trainer quelled by constant encouragement, laudatory praise. He had not seen a better prospect in the thirty years of encouraging pretenders.

Between tiring routine moments, the Manager recruited hanger-ons to go a few rounds. Greb would wear 18 oz pillow gloves. The pick-up opponent could not be injured.

Understood, that volunteer knew better than to whack Greb.

Even as a youngster, Greb was noted for a furious temper, roughhouse close-in tactics, punishing right and left hands.

Into this walked a younger steel worker. He was a year or two younger, similar build, really strong. Greb's manager suggested to Greb that he practice foot work with this steel worker. All knew this youngster as a winsome amateur, quick on his feet, a solid puncher. Quick and strong. But no boxer.

The overwhelming honor was accepted. In the center of the ring, the routine was explained. Greb was to press this opponent, keeping the left glove in the opponent's face, constantly obscuring Greb's and his dancing foot work.

A round was fought. The steelworker saw little of Greb, that left glove constantly just short of his nose. Greb and his manager were pleased. Next round, Greb was to back pedal everywhere, evade every attempt to land a punch.

The first two minutes went well. Then ignoring instructions Greb suddenly lurched forward, arms spread wide, head thrust toward the steel worker, shouting "BOO".

By coincidence, this was a blunder. The steelworker knew he was expected to strike at Greb. The routine had frustrated him. He had just seen a chance to strike at the Greb's head piece, and the right fist went over Greb's extending left. This struck Harry Greb solidly on the protruding jaw. Greb was on the canvas instantly.

Both startled boxers and Greb's 3 assistants were the only viewers of this moment.

Three assistants jumped into the ring. Two rushed Greb to the far corner. The Manager, grabbed the steel worker, thrust him through the ropes and out of the gym, telling him to stay away three days.

Harry Greb was furious, uninjured. He insisted the steel worker be brought back, punished. Hours later Greb, convinced that the punch was a fluke, his fault, could laugh. Besides no one but the steel worker and they knew, and the steel worker could be convinced to tell no one, as long as Harry Greb lived.

The steel worker kept his word.
Others wondered at the friendship that developed between the two
as Greb fought around the world.

Epilogue.

Harry Greb would fight over 300 professional bouts.
He was American Light Heavyweight Champ 1922-1923,
World Middleweight Champion 1923-1926.

He last fought in Feb 1926.

On Oct 23, that year, 1926, Harry Greb, a battered 32,
was operated on for head excessive damages received in the ring,
never awoke from the anesthetic.

The steel worker was my father, free to mention this friendship.



The brutal world of boxing, by George Bellows.