

Frankly Speaking
By FRANK HYDE
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A shrouded apparition standing on a fleecy white cloud and counting in a spectral voice ended the boxing career of Jimmy Clark, the bull-shouldered young Negro who learned to fight in self defense at Titusville and moved near ring greatness during the late 30s. "I don't know, I just don't know," said Jimmy, a familiar figure here where he has made his home since childhood, "but I do know I sure hung 'em up in a hurry. That was enough for me."

Clark, who won the world's amateur middleweight championship in the 1936 pre-Olympics and was termed by the late great Jack Johnson "one of the outstanding fighting machines of all time had he applied himself," was talking of the yesteryear. Johnson, the old ebony warrior who won the heavyweight title from Tommy Burns in 1908 and lost it to Jess Willard in 1915, was high on Clark after seeing him in action in Chicago, where he stopped Tony Zale in one round. But the fortunes of fistiana are fickle. Zale went on to become middleweight champion, reap a fortune from the ring and retire in security. Jimmy went the other way.

Yea, sir," Jimmy was saying, "when that fellow walked up over the foot of my bed and started to count, I knew I was through. No more box fightin' for Ol' Jimmy, no sir!" This is how he tells the story:

I'd been in the army at Ft. Dix . . . Didn't plan any more... But they talked me into trying out for the camp team... So, I knocked out a guy and felt pretty good, had 52 fights losing one... Well, I came out of service and one day went down to Pittsburgh with some friends. A promoter down there asked me to fill a spot, so I fought some fellow, don't recall his name now, and knocked him out.

"That's when it happened the first time. I was sound asleep in a Pittsburgh hotel when this thing comes walking right up onto the foot of my bed on top of a big, white cloud. He just raised his hand up and down and started to count - 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight nine, - just like that. 'Jimmy Clark,' he says, stopping the count, 'don't box any more or I'll count you out.'" Well, sir. I jumped out of bed in a cold sweat and looked all over, under the bed, in the closet, behind the curtains —nothing!

"So anyway, this promoter wants me to fight again! So I does and wins. The promoter feels so good about the way I am going he says: 'Jimmy, I'm going to get you a good money bout. I'll bring in Sheldon Bell of Youngstown for you. He's a big draw here and the way you are going you can beat him. That sounded good, so I says okay. That night I go to bed thinking about all the money I can make by beating Bell. Then my visitor showed up! Right up over the foot of the bed he walks on that danged cloud again and starts to count: 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine —' Then he stops and says: 'Jimmy Clark, this is the end. Next time I'll count you out!' . . . Man! That was enough for Ol' Jim. I hopped out of bed and called that promoter fellow at 3 o'clock in the morning and told him the fight was off —I was quitting the ring. He

thought I was nuts, but I said I'd made a promise. Didn't say who I'd made it to, but, boy, I've sure kept it!"

When people who know ring lore talk to Jimmy they ultimately mention Tony Zale because Tough Tony, the Gary Galvanizer who quit the steel mills to become the best at 160 pounds, wasn't peanuts. His battles with Rocky Graziano will live in boxing's limbo long after the principals have returned to dust. "Here's how it happened." Jim resumed, shifting a massive cigar from side to side. "I'm on my way to Milwaukee and just happen to stop in Chicago. Someone recognized me in a gym and finally I got an offer to fight some fellow... Never could remember names, you know... One of my friends told me 'better lay off his guy, Jim, Tony Zale is bringing him along and he's plenty rough'... So, being an ignorant country boy from Jamestown, N.Y., I say 'who's Tony Zale?... And knock his boy out in round one.

"Well, you know how those things are. The fans liked it so the promoter signed me with another of Zale's stable mates. 'This fellow is cute and may cut you up. Better tie him up, just try not to get hurt,' the fellows at the gym told me. I never did fight that way, though, so I go up to him. He's a tall guy with a long chin. He sticks that left in my puss a few times then I go under one, and there's that chin right in front of me. I whop it but good. Down he goes... Something like two minutes.

"That did it. They're yelling for me to fight Zale. That was in '38. Tony had a big year in '37, winning six and losing one. He started out right in '38 by beating Nate Bloden and Harry Schaft, a couple of big names around Chicago. We get together on Feb. 21 in Marigold Gardens. I get Ike Bernstein, the old fighter, to work my corner. "Better go after him, Jim," he says. "This Zale ain't got so much moxie when he's crowded... So I chase him along the ropes into a corner. He hooks me twice real good-like with his left, but he drops his hand, so I throw the counter hook. He sags so I hit him high on the temple with a right and as he starts down I hook the left again. He wriggled around down there like a fish out of water and as I go back to a neutral corner I hear Ike hiss: 'I got news for you, Jim. This guy ain't gettin' up.' And he didn't, so that's how it happened."

But sometimes a knockout starts a great fighter on his way. Zale was like that. He really got down to business, beat two or three fellows then asked for Jim again. They met a few months later and it was a lulu, Zale winning by a kayo in 8. Their third meeting found Jimmy on the sunset side and Zale was a knockout winner in two.

"After that I go into the Army, get a lot of sleep, regular hours and pretty good chow. I feel like a new man when I come out, but then I meet my sleepwalking friend in Pittsburgh. I know that's all for Ol' Jim."

