

Gene Tunney, Who Beat Dempsey Twice for Ring Title, Is Dead at 80

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Gene Tunney, the former heavyweight boxing champion who twice defeated Jack Dempsey, died late Tuesday at the Greenwich Hospital in Connecticut. He was 80 years old and had been suffering from a circulation ailment.

Mr. Tunney, who won the title by scoring a 10-round decision over Mr. Dempsey in 1926, retired undefeated as champion two years later after just two more bouts — one a return match with Mr. Dempsey that produced the famous “long count” of 1927.

At his Manhattan apartment yesterday, the 83-year-old Mr. Dempsey was broken up by the news of his old foe's death.

“I feel like a part of me is gone,” he said. “Because I was three years older than Gene, I always thought I would be the one to go first. As long as Gene was alive, I felt that we shared a link with that wonderful period of the past. Now I feel alone.”

Mr. Tunney's retirement in 1928 at the age of 30 stunned the boxing world, but the champion, who had won \$2 million, had no regrets. In contrast to other fighters whose earnings had slipped away, he managed to hold onto much of his winnings and enjoyed a later career as a successful executive and officer of several corporations and banks.

The father of former Senator John V. Tunney of California, Mr. Tunney is survived also by

his widow, the former Pelly Lauder; two other sons, Gene L. and Jonathon R., and a daughter, Joan Tunney Cook. Funeral services will be private, according to a spokesman for the Knapp Funeral Home in Greenwich, with burial in Connecticut.

Lectured on Shakespeare

Mr. Tunney, who earned \$990,445 for his first bout with Mr. Dempsey, collected his first paycheck of \$5 as an office boy in New York. Educated only in the public schools, he rose to an eminence that saw him lecture on Shakespeare at Yale.

Mr. Tunney was born in New York, at 416 West 52d Street, on May 25, 1898. He was the son of a longshoreman and had three brothers and a sister. He acquired the name of Gene because of his baby sister's inability to pronounce "Jim" properly.

His family moved to Greenwich Village when he was 3 months old. There he attended school until he was 16, when he went to work. In his leisure time he engaged in a variety of athletic activities, showing a preference for boxing.

Served in France

Mr. Tunney engaged in two professional fights as a middleweight before joining the Marines in 1917. During his service in France, he participated in boxing programs, showing skill and strength that enabled him to rise to the lightweight championship of the American Expeditionary Force in 1918.

After returning home, he resumed his pro career, and in 1922 captured the lightweight championship of the United States from Battling Levinsky.

Mr. Tunney lost the title the same year to Harry Greb in a one-sided 15-rounder. It was his only setback in a pro career of 65 fights. But it was only a temporary setback, however. He soon engaged Mr. Greb again, this time winning easily.

Becomes Heavyweight Contender

After a 15-round victory over Georges Carpentier on July 24, 1924, and a 12-round knockout of Tommy Gibbons on June 5, 1925, Mr. Tunney emerged as a challenger for the heavyweight championship held by Mr. Dempsey. A title fight was arranged for Sept. 23, 1926, in Philadelphia. It turned out to be one of the most successful promotions in the history of boxing.

A crowd of 118,736 paid \$1,895,723 to watch the methodical Mr. Tunney achieve a decisive victory over the defending champion, who was the 4-to-1 favorite.

A rematch was widely demanded by fans who had refused to believe the Manassa Mauler could be beaten, and it was arranged by Tex Rickard, the promoter, in Chicago.

That fight, staged on Sept. 22, 1927, was even more successful than the Philadelphia one. It drew a crowd of 102,450 and receipts of \$2,658,660 at Soldier Field. Its climax was the matter of the long count.

Mr. Tunney won the decision, again in 10 rounds, but before he did he suffered a knockdown that thousands of witnesses swore was a proper knockout. It occurred in the seventh round when Mr. Dempsey landed six punches to the jaw to floor his foe in a neutral

corner.

Mr. Tunney, eyes dull, mouth agape, groped with his right arm for a rope that seemed to escape his feeble clutch. The knockdown timekeeper, Paul Beeler, started counting from his post outside the ring as soon as Mr. Tunney fell. Referee Dave Barry, however, motioned Mr. Dempsey to a corner opposite his fallen foe. But Mr. Dempsey stood, defiantly, in the corner almost immediately above his foe, and it was not until Mr. Beeler's count had gone to 4 that Mr. Dempsey moved. Then Referee Barry started counting at 1.

With a great effort, Mr. Tunney regained his feet at 9 on the referee's count. He gave an exhibition of superb defensive boxing and backpedaling to survive the round. He came out strong for the eighth, in which he sent Mr. Dempsey to one knee with a right to the jaw, and remained the master to the end.

For that fight Mr. Tunney was paid \$990,445. He engaged in only one more after that, defeating Tom Heeney of New Zealand at Yankee Stadium on July 26, 1928.

Mr. Tunney had enjoyed little popularity among fight fans. He was a boxer in a time when punchers like Mr. Dempsey were idolized. After his retirement, the fans resented his blandness, his literacy, his wealth and his decision to retire undefeated.

He had a genuine love for learning, and read extensively. He was a Shakespeare enthusiast in his fighting days, and while he held the title he lectured on the Bard before 200 students at Yale, where he was made an honorary member of Pundits, a society of with and scholars.

United Press International

Gene Tunney in 1964

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