

Every month we mark the anniversary of a momentous fight from boxing's long and dramatic history

1995

EUBANK
VS
COLLINS I
18 March, County Cork



Hypnotised or not, **Chris Eubank** found his grip on the WBO super middleweight title loosening in memorable fashion 11 years ago this month. His challenger for this 15th defence of the belt was **Steve Collins**, the reigning WBO middleweight champion. Collins had learnt his trade in America and had already failed in two attempts for the WBA middleweight strap before defeating Leicester's Chris Pyatt for the WBO version in 1994.

Prior to the fight, stories abounded of how Collins was employing the services of a hypnotist to help him secure victory. If Collins's intention was to get under the skin of the unconventional champion, it seemed to do the trick.

The first round was fairly nondescript in terms of meaningful action. Both fighters remained cautious: the calm before a storm. As ever, Eubank looked in great shape but Collins, in front of a fiercely partisan crowd at the Green Glens Arena, County Cork, exuded confidence.

From the second round — and for the majority of the next six sessions — Collins took the fight by the scruff of the neck. The Irishman's jab started to work, catching Eubank time and again as he lunged forwards, looking for the single heavy blow that might stop his marauding foe in his tracks.

In the fifth, Eubank was hurt, as noted by Ian Chadband in the following day's edition of *The Sunday Times*: "A three-

HARD WORK rather than hypnotism provided the opportunity for Collins to give Eubank a taste of something new — defeat

punch combination visibly rattled Eubank, leaving his legs buckling ever so slightly and his mouth agape."

Eubank fought back strongly, especially in the seventh. For once, he was coming out on top in a trade of jabs and getting his punches off a split-second quicker. However, all that good work was undone in an instant in the following round. The titleholder, never known for his perfect balance, was caught flat-footed as the Irishman connected with an innocuous-looking punch to the chest. Eubank fell on to his back. He quickly got up but had to take an eight count.

The knockdown seemed to bring Eubank to life and he staggered Collins with a long right. It was a 10-8 round for Collins but he was perhaps the more relieved to hear the bell.

The 10th round provided the best action of the whole contest. Eubank's first meaningful punch — another stinging right-hand — sent Collins to the deck. It was the Irishman's first acquaintance with the canvas in his professional career, stretching back some 32 fights and over nine years.

Collins was hurt and there was over two minutes left in the round for Eubank to finish the job. And yet he failed to do so. Instead, he began the showboating that so frustrated fans of the Brighton eccentric. It allowed Collins, always a resilient type, to clear his head. Of course, there was an explanation for Eubank's

lack of fight-ending purpose at this point. In the fighter's own words in his autobiography: "I didn't want what became of [Michael] Watson to happen again, so I froze."

The penultimate round was tough going. Collins, in particular, was desperately tired. Eubank edged the round and was again the stronger as both men gave it their all in the last, but he could not stop Collins, who won by unanimous decision. Eubank's days as a world champion were over.

"Steve Collins out-thought, outmanoeuvred and ultimately outpointed one of British sport's most mercurial figures," wrote Chadband.

Collins's career went from strength to strength. He defeated Eubank on a split decision in the rematch later that same year before going on to successfully defend his title a further six times in two years, including two inside-schedule victories over Nigel Benn. He retired in 1997, undefeated as champion.

Chris Eubank's popularity with the British public after the first defeat of his professional career actually rose in inverse proportion to his success inside the ring, especially after stirring-but-unsuccessful performances against Joe Calzaghe and Carl Thompson. Love him or loathe him, the choice is yours, but don't deny his immense contribution to the popularity of boxing in this country during the 1990s