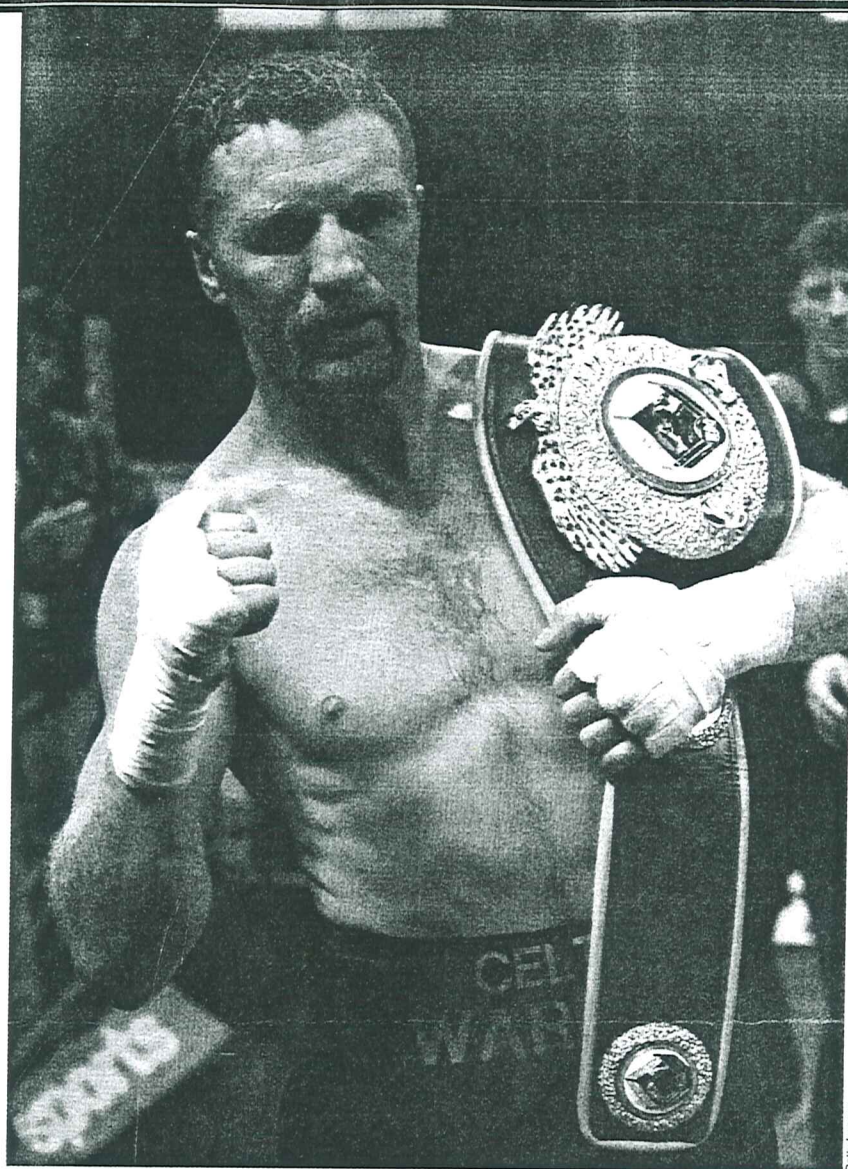


Green card is played again

When “Gentleman” Jim Corbett was deposed as heavyweight champion on St. Patrick’s Day 1897 in Carson City, Nevada, his anguish at losing the title was deepened by the fact that he had lost it to an Englishman. Corbett might have consoled himself that Bob Fitzsimmons’s father was Irish, and that the Cornishman was a United States citizen at the time of their bout, but that apparently did not occur to him, and it is doubtful he would have felt any better if it had. As far as he was concerned, Fitzsimmons was an Englishman and a foreigner. Fitzsimmons himself was proud to be Cornish, which is not necessarily the same as saying he was proud to be English (Cornish people of my acquaintance tend to consider themselves Cornish first and English a rather distant second). But the fact remains that Fitzsimmons, had he wished to do so, could have played the Irish card just as vociferously as Corbett and any of the other American-born fighters who have draped themselves in the green and shamrock throughout boxing’s history.

The above musings came to me on pondering my esteemed editor’s fearless denunciation of the BBB of C’s asinine decision to introduce a Celtic title for fighters of Irish, Scottish, or Welsh extraction (see “Comment” in the January issue), and were given further impetus on reading Roger Anderson’s *The Fighting Irish: Inside the Ring with Boxing’s Celtic Warriors* (Mainstream Publishing, £15.99). While it would be pointless to deny that boxing, and boxers themselves, have profited from, and continue to profit from, ethnic match-ups, there is still something rather disagreeable (and indeed, *passé*) about subdividing boxers on the grounds of race. After all, if the colour bar and the search for a “white hope” have been rightly consigned to boxing’s past, then any emphasis on a boxer’s background that panders to nationalism, tribalism, or sectarianism should likewise be discouraged, not on any spurious grounds of political correctness but as a matter of respect.

Not, I should hasten to make clear, that Mr Anderson’s book is guilty of any of the above; indeed it is a model of even-handedness, and, whatever general thoughts it might prompt on the question of racial categorisation in boxing, it would be absurdly disproportionate and heavy-handed to suggest that a writer should not use the backgrounds of fighters as a set of parameters for an historical work. *The Fighting Irish*, as pugilist-specialist-readers will have noted, shares



STEVE COLLINS: a more recent participant included in book on Irish fighters

its title with the excellent 1987 book by Patrick Myler, but whereas the latter confined itself to boxers born in Ireland, Mr Anderson has opted to include all boxers of Irish descent, which largely means, in effect, all Irish-American fighters of note.

Mr Anderson has been diligent in rounding up all the usual suspects, and of course he has brought the story of Irish boxing up-to-date with sections on the likes of Wayne McCullough, Steve Collins, and featherweight prospect Bernard Dunne. Flyweight Damaen Kelly, however, is conspicuous by his absence, and the British angle seems to have escaped Mr Anderson’s net, with no mention of, for instance, Billy Schwer, Michael Gomez, Francis Barrett, or trainer Brendan Ingle. As might be expected, the book works best when chronicling the exploits of boxers in the lighter divisions, such as the late, great Jimmy McLarnin, but pugilist-specialist-readers may well balk at the prospect of wading through yet another retelling of the careers of the heavy mob, Sullivan, Corbett, Dempsey, Tunney, *et al.* Nonetheless, *The Fighting Irish* is well-researched, well-written, and well worth the price. There are 18 rather

obvious black-and-white photographs, an index, and an excellent cover photograph of Eamonn Magee by Lonsdale belt-holder-turned ace shutterbug, Hughie Russell.

I’m sure all *Boxing Monthly* readers will join me in saying a heartfelt *auf Wiedersehen* to the recently departed Max Schmeling, as brave a man outside the ropes as within (and one who knew all too well about the role of race in boxing). Anyone intrigued by Herr Max’s obituaries should make haste to order a copy of his fascinating “Autobiography”, published by Bonus Books of Chicago (available from amazon at £24.99, and worth every penny). More on Max soon when I’ll be reviewing Patrick Myler’s forthcoming *Ring of Hate*, the story of the Louis-Schmeling bouts. Also departed, on 30 January, aged 77, Coley Wallace, the heavyweight who beat Rocky Marciano as an amateur and starred in *The Joe Louis Story* (reviewed last month). And finally, I was saddened to learn of the early death, aged 64, of Jim McNeill, author of *That Night in the Garden* and the outstanding *They Could’ve Been Contenders*, one of the best boxing books I’ve ever read, and a fitting memorial to a fine writer.