

Toronto Star Weekly
May 15, 1920

Toronto Women Who Went to Prizefight Applauded the Rough Stuff

Toronto women were present at prizefights for the first time last Saturday night. A press agent story said there would be four hundred boxes filled with members of society attending the bouts in evening clothes. There really were about a hundred women present.

They came ostensibly to see Georges Carpentier give a sparring exhibition. In reality they saw a series of gladiatorial combats and they smiled and applauded through it all. For the benefit of those Toronto women who do not attend prizefights, this is what they saw, and this is how they acted.

In the center of the floor of the Arena is a raised platform with a square of roped-off space. Rows of seats are banked on each side of the ring. A number of women were sprinkled among the men who occupied these ringside places. More women were scattered in the boxes along the side of the ring.

Two women sat just behind me at the ringside with their escorts.

"They wear gloves so they can't hurt each other," one of the men explained to his girl.

In the first bout a young stockily built Jewish boy in about a minute and a half clouted into insensibility a much smaller, weaker and inexperienced lad from Hamilton. The little kid never had a chance against his huskier opponent, who smashed him around the roped enclosure from the clang of the gong, and finally hit him hard enough so that he stayed on the floor. It was not a display of skill, of science nor of nerve. It was simply a case of a larger, stronger kid knocking a smaller and weaker kid unconscious. It was not a pretty sight.

"My, that one was over quickly!" said one of the women back of me, with obvious disappointment.

"I'll say it was," exulted her partner. "Young Lisner sure clouted that baby plenty."

The second so-called boxing bout was even shorter. A hard-faced, heavily muscled slugger with a reputation for cowardice was in one corner. A big, fat, lubberly chap, who looked as though he had never been in a ring before, occupied the other.

As the gong rang the craggy-faced slugger shot out of his corner. The club made an awkward attempt to put up his hands. The slugger swung his right fist in a deadly semicircle to the dub's jaw, and the fight was over. The fat, untrained dub crashed on his face on the resined canvas. When his seconds pulled him over to his corner, the canvas had sandpapered most of the skin off one side of his face. The slugger had knocked out the set-up provided to get him back into the good graces of his hometown as a fighter.

He spat on the floor, assumed a "look what I've done to that guy" expression, and walked out of the ring and climbed down the platform.

Everyone applauded, including the ladies.

"He hit him pretty hard, didn't he?" said one of the women.

"I hope ta tell ya he did," answered her partner gleefully.

Over in his corner the dub's handlers were working over him, sponging the blood off his sandpapered face and bringing him back to his senses with cold water. It was not a pretty sight.

It was during the fourth bout between a hard-hitting, perfectly conditioned little Toronto fighting machine named Benny Gould and a willing, nervous youth from Buffalo who was proving himself a good bleeder that the women's attention was distracted from the ring. A box party of prominent Torontonians entered and settled themselves in the box. Every woman in the Arena eyed them in a quick attempt to identify the ladies of the party whose coming gave social sanction to their own presence.

Just then the willing bleeder from Buffalo landed his first blows of the fight, and there was a burst of applause. The slender kid with the badly smashed face was fighting back like a tiger and soon had young Gould's face bloody. But he was outclassed by the more experienced boxer, who continued to batter him till the end of the fight.

The society box party smiled and applauded all through the fight. But the hardened fans at the ringside, while they applauded the game fight the Buffalo kid was making, did not smile. For they could see the terrific punishment he was taking. They watched the way Gould kept smashing his left fist onto the kid's broken nose. They knew the way Gould's punches were weakening the kid. They admired his game fight but they did not smile. But the ladies in the box party smiled every minute.

In the old days at the Colosseum in Rome the ex-gladiators and their pals who sat at the side of the arena applauded the deadly thrusts. They clapped when a swing of the cestus bashed in a Cisalpine gladiator's face. They may have cheered when the man with the fishnet and the trident entangled his opponent with the short sword and they clapped when he finished him with a few well-placed thrusts of the spear. But they didn't laugh. They knew what it meant.

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound." And as on last Saturday night the laughter was reserved for the nobility.

Then the champion of Europe and the idol of France, with a name that is pronounced as many ways as Ypres used to be, danced through four rounds with his sparring partner. The sparring partner was evidently selected because of his startling facial likeness to a certain Mr. Jack Dempsey. His name is Laniers, pronounced Lanears by the referee and he lets M. Carpentier hit him about two hundred and fifty times during the course of the entertainment.

Carpentier showed the ladies present that he has a nice taste in dressing gowns, two hands that strike as fast as cobras, and a rather good-looking face. He got into the ring, stood at attention while the "Marseillaise" was played and then slapped, poked, jabbed, stabbed, jolted, hooked and biffed Lanaers around the ring for four short rounds. Then he left the ring and went home.

But did any of the ladies who had come only to see Georges Carpentier leave after he had made his exit? They did not. They stayed and cheered while chubby Bobby Eber of Hamilton clouted Toronto's gamest and toughest featherweight around the ring for six rounds. And the two ladies who sat back of me were several times distinctly heard yelling for a knockout.

Is it the magic name Arena that brings back to the alleged gentler sex their old Roman attributes? Lecky, the historian, says that the majority of the old gladiatorial crowds were women.

Madame Carpentier wasn't there though. Her husband is a fighter and she knows what it means. So she stayed home and waited for Georges.