



I'll bet the mortgage that if you were to ask 20 of the world's leading pugilistic experts whom they regard as the SWEET SCIENCE'S second all time greatest fighter, pound-for-pound you'd probably receive 20 different answers.

Detroit's legendary "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis, the man who wore the world heavyweight crown so gallantly from 1936 till 1949 and defended it a record 25 times, would quickly come to mind. Or, how about the pride of St. Louis, Henry Armstrong, or as they used to call him, "Homicide Hank". Armstrong has the distinction of being the only fighter to hold three world titles simultaneously. I've heard some pretty solid arguments as to why some folks view him as pound-for-pound the baddest of the bad. But then again how can we forget the man of a thousand moves, boxing's wizard and great featherweight Champ, Willie Pep? This kid had more moves than a bowl of Jello. Whatever Pep lacked in power he sure made up in smarts and talent. Pep turned pro in 1940, one month before his 18th birthday and ran up a streak of 62 straight wins before suffering his first loss to Sammy Angott. Then the Hartford boxing wizard proceeded to rack up another astounding 73 wins in a row. He was truly one of the all-time greats. Others, many of the younger set argue, the legendary "Louisville Lip", Muhammad Ali, one of only two men to capture the world heavyweight title three times, deserves the honour of being called the greatest pound-for-pound. We could argue this point into eternity, and certainly there are a host of other greats who deserve honourable mention. How about some of the other immortals like Archie Moore, boxing king of the KO's. It's also tough to discard Roberto Duran, Sugar Ray Leonard, Rocky Marciano, Carlos Monzon and Jack Johnson. All of the aforementioned were dominant forces during their era and each one of these immortal gladiators challenged and conquered the call to glory. Like I said, ask any of the fistic experts whom they regard as the second greatest to lace them on and you'll get 20 different answers. Now, ask these very same people who they regard as the greatest of them all pound for pound. We're talking finesse, power, endurance, killer instinct, ring savvy, and above all, pride and honour. Well, that's just what I did and guess what? The reply was unanimous! It was former six-time world boxing champion and the original sugar man himself, Sugar Ray Robinson.

It wasn't just a fan choice either. The Sugar Man's status as the greatest of them all was also shared by a great many of his legendary peers, including arch rival Jake LaMotta who tangled with him six times. During an interview I had with him a couple years back, he told me Robinson was the best pure boxer he'd ever seen. He called him a brilliant fighter who simply had no weaknesses. He could out-smart the boxers and out-punch the

slugger. I guess if anyone has the right credentials to evaluate Robinson's pugilistic talents, LaMotta's are impeccable. The Bronx Bull and the Sugar Man rumbled through six brutal battles. In fact, the two fought so many times it's a wonder LaMotta didn't get Sugar Diabetes. Their last encounter, a pugilistic classic which took place in Chicago back in 1951, was so brutal the media deemed it the St. Valentine's Day massacre.

Rocky Graziano a loveable thug who reigned as New York City's king of the hub cap thieves long before he wore the middleweight crown, also exalted Robinson as the greatest of them all. Prior to meeting Sugar Ray in April of '52, the murderous-punching Graziano had an undefeated streak of 21 straight fights, including an impressive 17 via the K.O. route. There was even noise that he stood a puncher's chance against the seemingly invincible Robinson. The dynamite New Yorkers exciting, take-no-prisoners style, had captured fight fans imagination. From the opening bell he gambled and played Russian roulette with the sugar man, and it almost paid off. In the second round he exploded with a left hook that sent Robbie crashing to the canvas and for all intents and purposes it should have been over. Remember, this was the very same right hand that had rendered the man of steel Tony Zale senseless. It was the same missile that had blown Freddie Cochrane, Marty Servo and Bummy Davis into oblivion. But on this particular night of April 16 1952, in the windy city of Chicago, Robinson rose belligerently from the canvas, collected his senses and proceeded to do what all entrepreneurs do best. He took care of business! Halfway through the third round, following an electrifying display of masterful boxing, the Sugar Man unloaded his vaunted bread and butter left hook, and it was lights out Rocky! In a post fight interview, Graziano echoed LaMotta's sentiments and endorsed Robinson as the greatest he'd ever seen. He added that Robby had it all. Speed, power, heart, smarts and a great chin.

Muhammad Ali, who many regard as the best heavyweight of all time, and former welterweight great Kid Gavilan, are just a couple more of Robinson's peers who endorse him as the greatest of them all. Yet, in spite of all the glory, even the great Robinson wasn't without his critics. Rugged Gene Fullmer, a former two-time world middleweight champ, was a devout Mormon and a praying man. But when the bell rang he laid his beliefs aside and turned the ring into a Central Park muggers' convention. He and Robinson shared an inane dislike for one another and the two became bitter rivals in and out of the ring.

Those malevolent feelings produced four classic brawls between them. In their first encounter, Fullmer wrestled and brawled the title away from Robinson in a bitterly fought 15 round contest. Less than six months later, Robinson recaptured his cherished crown with a stunning fifth round K.O. over the granite-jawed Mormon. This marked the first time in his career that Fullmer had ever been K.O.'d. The two met twice more, once in 1960, in yet another battle royal, which was declared a draw. Their final clash took place in 1961, which resulted in a 15-round victory for Fullmer. "He may have been the greatest to some people, but I never felt he was that great," said Fullmer, "My style gave him fits. I don't consider our fights among my toughest ones. He always held a lot and complained even more." Perhaps the hostile feelings Fullmer harboured for Robinson had clouded his logic. Or possibly his reasoning is based on the premise that because he defeated Robinson twice during their four encounters and drew with him on another occasion, he was the better of the two. But in reality, something that seems to delude him

is the cold, hard truth. When he and Robinson brawled, the Sugar Man was crowding 40 while Fullmer was in his prime years. To even think he could have successfully tested Ray's valour during the Sugar Man's prime years is nothing more than an amusing case of wishful thinking.

Fighting Robinson in his prime was a death wish. Prior to his fights with Fullmer, the Harlem hot shot had completely dominated all the greats of that era, including Jake LaMotta, Randy Turpin, Henry Armstrong, Rocky Graziano, Carl 'Bobo' Olson, Kid Gavilan, Fritzie Zivic and Marty Servo. Any one of these men would have given the Mormon deacon one hell of a night. When the aging Sugar Man fought Fulmer, he was already a member in good standing of the over-the-hill gang. Father Time had relinquished the blinding reflexes Mother Nature has bestowed upon her sweet science's favourite son. During his prime years, not only was Robinson spectacular, but he was virtually unconquerable. Even as an amateur there was little doubt that nothing short of immortality would satisfy him. After winning the National Golden Gloves at Madison Square Garden, the New York press touted him as the greatest thing since Louis. In 85 amateur fights he was undefeated. Sixty-nine of those fights were by K.O.'s, including 40 inside of the first round. Robinson turned pro at 20 years of age in 1940 and ran off 40 consecutive wins, 29 of them by K.O. Unlike many of the current primadonnas who fatten their stats on the "dearly departed", Robinson was doing-in the big names like Zivic, Armstrong and Marty Servo. His first loss came compliments the rough and tumble Jake LaMotta who edged him out in a close decision. Robinson didn't make any excuses but the fact remains LaMotta had out weighed him by close to 15 pounds.

Over the next dozen years, Robinson became the most feared fighter in the welterweight and middleweight division and remained undefeated in over 90 fights. This included five wins over LaMotta. It was 1946, seven years after he turned pro, that the Sugar Man captured the Welterweight crown, which was the first of his six world titles. In 1951, after cleaning out the welterweight ranks, he invaded the middleweight division and K.O.'d LaMotta in the 13th round to capture the Middleweight title. He would go on to win it another four times.

Only the sweltering heat and exhaustion prevented him from joining Henry Armstrong and Bob Fitzsimons as the boxing's only true triple champions, when he collapsed in his corner and couldn't answer the bell for the 14th round. It was a fight in which he was way out front of Joey Maxim. It also the only time in during his 202 fights in which he was stopped. During a spectacular career which spanned well over 20 years, he won 175 times, suffered 19 defeats and K.O.'d 110 opponents. Robinson will always be cherished as one the sweet-science's most fearless warriors, but also as one of its most compassionate philanthropists. His noble efforts and deeds through the Sugar Ray Robinson Youth Foundation, will always be treasured by the citizens of Los Angeles.

The great Sugar Ray Robinson passed away a few years back. But his boxing exploits, warm smile will remain as immortal as he was. Take my word for it. The fighter that can match his extraordinary skills has yet to see the light of day. Sugar Ray Robinson he was the greatest pound for pound. We could argue this point into eternity, and certainly there are a host of other greats who deserve honourable mention. How about some of the other immortals like Archie Moore, boxing king of the KO's. It's also tough to discard Roberto

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