



Willie Pep vs. Sandy Saddler: Notes on the Boxing Legends and Epic Rivalry

Doug Werner

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Any discussion of great boxers must include Willie Pep and Sandy Saddler—midcentury featherweight champions whose heroics electrified the fistic world then and reverberate today. This book explores the boxing lives of both pugilists—early years, fighting years, training and conditioning, historical context, life after boxing, and, of course, the lasting controversy over their rivalry and legacy. Pep recorded 229 wins, only 11 losses and one draw over a pro career that spanned three decades. He won the featherweight crown twice. Sandy Saddler's record of 144-16-2 includes an amazing 103 knockouts. He also won the title twice and retired an undefeated featherweight champion. Their four title bouts are an epic showcase of contrasts. Pep was the exquisite dancer/boxer, a wildly popular Italian American personality who made his opponents miss and scored at will. Saddler was a curious blend of unprepossessing menace—a tall, thin, black American banger who pressed and brutalized with singular leveraged force. Their matchups had it all: contrasting styles, dazzling skills, hard punching, splendid action, ridiculous brawling, heroic victories and crashing defeats. Included in this book are Pep's plane crash and recovery as well as the legal wrangling with *Newsweek* over his boxing reputation. Saddler's ongoing slight in boxing history and secondary status with Pep is examined under fresh light. The text is highlighted with several images of both fighters that bring to life the fierce glory of professional boxing in the 1940s and 50s.

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