

ARCHIE MOORE

The Greatest Light Heavyweight Fight Of All-Time



By Jim Prime

Some called it The Fight of the Decade. Others went further, declaring it The Fight of the Half-Century. Hardly unusual in a sport whose very lifeblood is hyperbole. Today, of course, these claims are made before the fight is even held. But in the case of the first Archie Moore-Yvon Durelle title bout, these grand assessments were not part of the giddy prefight hype dreamed up by frenzied promoters. Instead, they were the sober judgments of hardened ring aficiona-

dos one day after. No less an authority than Joe Louis called it, "The greatest fight I've seen."

For world champion Moore, the classic light heavyweight battle was the brightest jewel in a dazzling crown of fistic accomplishments. For Canada's Durelle, it was more of a solitaire, a moment of instant fame and bittersweet immortality.

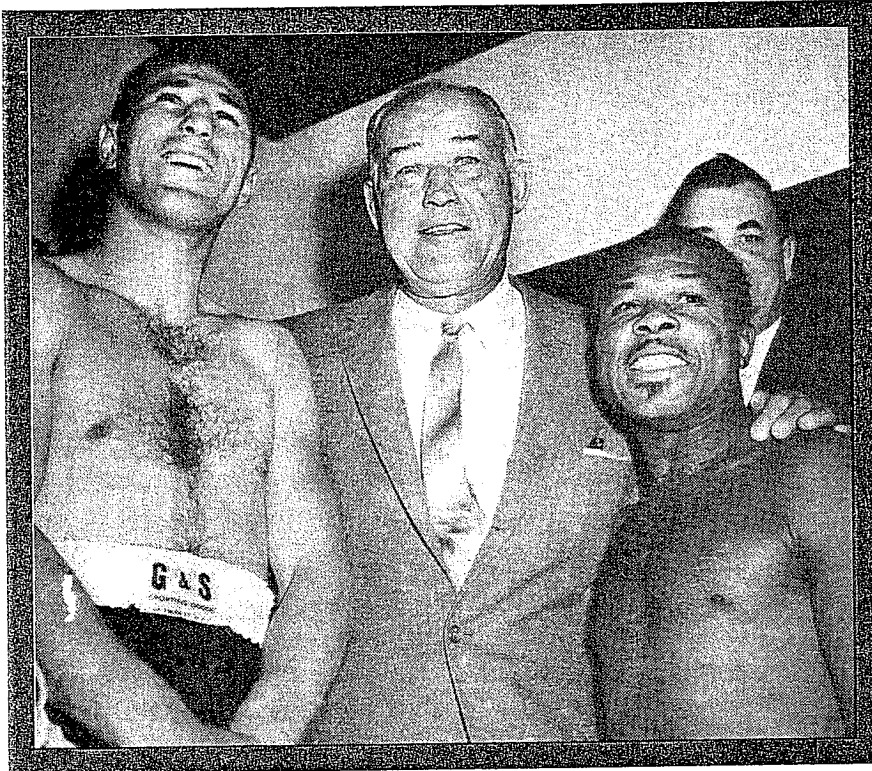
More than 38 years after the original "Brawl In Montreal," the two men look back to their epic battle, held at the Forum in Montreal on December 10, 1958, with an almost fond, time-filtered nostalgia. The

two were a study in contrasts, and they remain so.

The dapper and ageless Moore is a soft-spoken, articulate black man of great self-discipline and an almost palpable, hard-earned dignity. During his lengthy title reign, his spartan training regimen and exotic aborigine diet helped to create an almost mystical aura. It is an aura that remains even today.

Canadian and British Empire champion Durelle was a backwoods brawler whose only training came from hauling lobster traps from the icy waters near his home vil-

YVON DURELLE I



Durelle and Moore pose at the weigh-in with former heavyweight champion Jack Sharkey, who refereed their first title fight. Moore, 44, defended the world light heavyweight title vs. Canada's Durelle at the Montreal Forum.

lage of Baie Ste. Anne, New Brunswick. A skeptical *Sports Illustrated* suggested "when Durelle throws a hook, it is more likely to catch a haddock than an experienced boxer."

Durelle, of Acadian-French stock, drank heavily, often while in preparation for a major fight, and ignored every known convention of boxing etiquette. When "The Fighting Fisherman," as he was dubbed by his legions of Canadian fans, recounts past battles, he evokes vivid cartoon images of fists disappearing elbow-deep into stomachs, and stunned opponents lifted vertically from the canvas by the force of superhuman punches. Popeye the Sailor Man vs. an endless parade of Blutos.

Despite their obvious social and cultural differences, Durelle and Moore have become good friends over the years. Theirs is a bond forged from a common battle for respect.

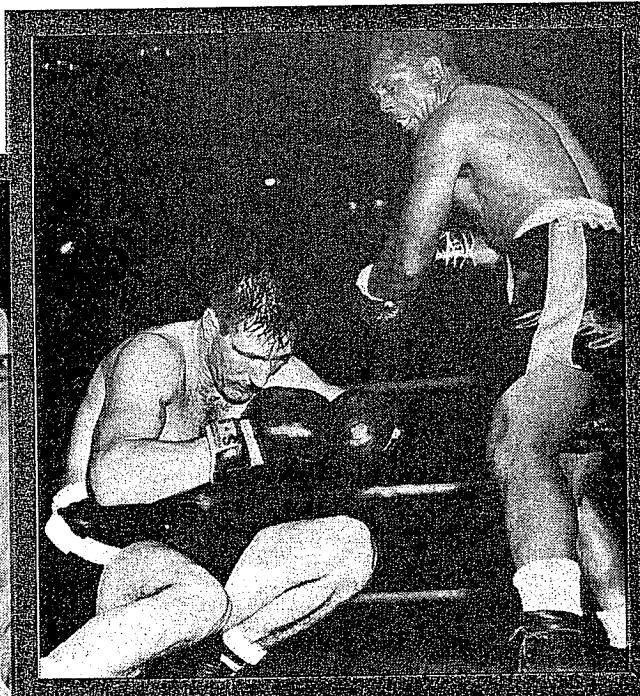
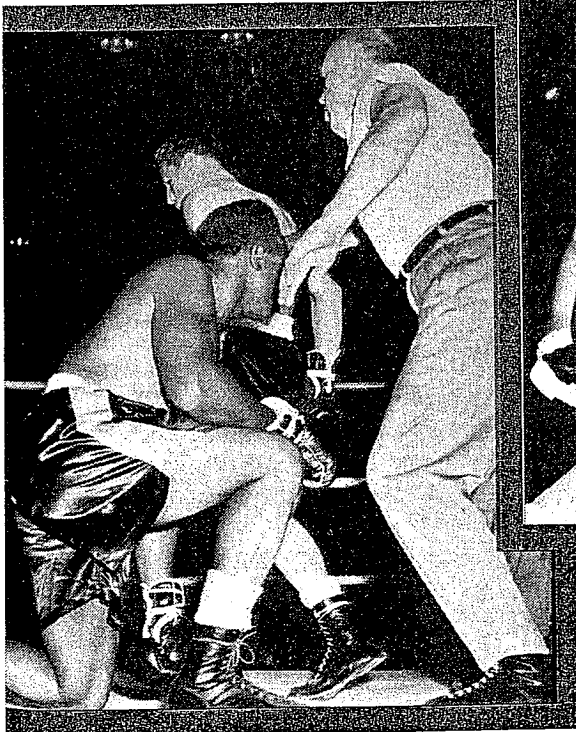
"I love Yvon Durelle like a childhood pal, a buddy," says Moore with surprising gentleness in his voice. "And as the years go by, I can enjoy our great fights even more knowing that he's a healthy man who is in charge of his faculties and has the admiration of the people around him."

Durelle has equally high praise for his one-time adversary.

"I think the world of him," he says in a thick, gravely drone that does little to discourage the Popeye comparison. "He's a real gentleman, and we respect each other."

Moore, the suave former champion whose real age was a hotly debated topic

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Moore crashed three times in the first round (left), then again in the fifth. Somehow he survived, and with the challenger having punched himself out in the early rounds, "The Ol' Mongoose" kept the crown with an 11th-round kayo (above).

with a laugh. "But I have control. It's just a matter of personal control."

"He doesn't need that much guidance because it's been put into him to be a good kid," said Rivera Martino. "He doesn't have to be watched that closely." But then came a warning from an insider who has seen the crash-landings of many a Puerto Rican world champion: "There's still time to see how he develops as a person. Look what happened to some of the others."

Hall of Famer Gomez is generally regarded as the finest Puerto Rican fighter in history. Should Trinidad defeat Norris, there might be two at the top. That's how important the fight is to both Trinidad and the island.

Asked to name the best fighters he's faced, Trinidad answered "Hector Camacho, Yori Boy Campas, and Maurice Blocker." Then he acknowledged that Norris is better than all of them. "He's a great fighter, a great puncher," Trinidad said. "But I have more ability. I can move around better, I'm very confident in my conditioning, and I have youth on my side." (Norris is 29.)

And what if the second-round jinx con-

tinues to haunt him?

"Any great fighter, if he's hit with a good, solid punch on the jaw, the normal thing to do is to go down," he said. "When I get in the ring, I'm confident I'm going to win. Sometimes it's not until I'm dropped that I realize I have to pick up the pace. There's no anger involved. Maybe the confidence is a negative factor. It's not until I get hit that my intensity goes up."

As lunch was cleared from the table, THE RING pointed out that if he's successful against Norris, Trinidad will instantly become far more familiar to American fans. What, then, should we know about him that we don't already know?

Trinidad thought for a while. "I hope to eventually speak English," he said. "And my message to the American fans is that I'm a great boxer, a great fighter whose image is clean and untouchable. I'm conscious of the fact that I'm a role model right now in Puerto Rico to young people and everyone else, and I'd like to maintain that. That's one of my goals."

Then, speaking English for the first time since arriving at the hotel, he said, "The winner and new champion ..."

Moore-Durelle

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in the sporting pages of the '50s and '60s (he should be approaching 85 now), speaks in almost reverential terms about the impact of the fight on his life.

"If people can remember something for four decades and it can still cause them such jubilation, then I think it's worthwhile for me to remember and revere," he says emphatically. "I do know that I made an extraordinary effort in that fight in order to preserve my dignity and the dignity of boxing. I think I proved that I could fight with the very best men ... and that was the joy of my life—boxing."

The memories are incredibly fresh in the minds of both fighters, even if they are at odds regarding some between-rounds details.

The fight began with the venerable Moore, then 44, bobbing and weaving and taunting his opponent. But just a minute into the first round, Durelle sent the champ reeling with a hard right that had been set up by a disarming hook to the body. All

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