

PETERSON, JOHN CHARLES (JACK PETERSEN) (1911-1990), boxer

Name: John Charles Peterson
Date of birth: 1911
Date of death: 1990
Spouse: Annie Elizabeth Peterson (née Williams)
Child: Elizabeth Peterson
Child: Robert Peterson
Child: David Peterson
Child: Michael Peterson
Child: John Peterson
Parent: Melinda Laura Peterson (née Rossiter)
Parent: John Thomas Peterson
Gender: Male
Occupation: boxer
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Mel Williams

Jack Petersen was born at 52, Monthermer Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff on 2 September 1911, one of the three children of John Thomas Peterson (1889-1945) and his wife Melinda Laura Rossiter. He was baptized John Charles Peterson, but adopted the spelling Petersen for his professional career. His father came to Cardiff from Cork and his grandfather was originally from Norway. Petersen's father was a physiotherapist and massage specialist prominent in Cardiff boxing circles, where he was known as Pa, Pop or J. T. In 1905 he established the Lynn Institute in St John's Square, which became a well-known training centre for boxers and wrestlers, also frequented by sportsmen and Cardiff business people.

Petersen had a very successful amateur career, winning his first title, ABA Light Heavyweight Champion of Wales, at the Drill Hall in Cardiff on 23 February 1931, and a month later he became Light Heavyweight Champion of Britain. His father then got together a syndicate of sports backers to enable him to turn professional in 1931, fighting under the name Jack Petersen.

In his first professional fight in September 1931 he defeated the giant Bill Partridge in the fourth round at the Holborn Stadium in London, despite being three stone lighter. In just over three months as a professional boxer he fought thirteen bouts, and during 1932 he won three titles, the Welsh Heavyweight Championship against Dick Power, the British Light Heavyweight Championship against Harry Crossley, and the British Heavyweight Championship against Reggie Meen. He knocked Meen out in the second round to become the first Welshman to win the British Heavyweight title. At the age of only twenty he was the youngest fighter ever to win the title.

In 1933 he fought seven times, defeating the six foot four inch Irishman Jack Doyle, who was four stone heavier than Petersen, and winning the Lonsdale Belt. At the end of that year, however, he was defeated for the first time in twenty-five fights, by Len Harvey, losing his British Heavyweight title.

1934 was a very successful year for him; he won all of his seven fights, securing the Heavyweight Championship of Britain and the Commonwealth in his second match against Len Harvey, again the first Welshman to win that title. By now he had won thirty-two fights and lost only one.

Petersen fought only twice in 1935, and he lost on both occasions to the powerful German boxer Walter Neusel. In the second match he was ahead in a close match which had taken its toll on both men; at the beginning of the tenth round, when Neusel was on the verge of giving up, Pa Petersen threw the towel into the ring by mistake and as a result Jack lost the match. This was the last time that he fought under his father's management.

On 29 January 1936 he successfully defended his title against Len Harvey, and then on 23 April he defeated Jock McAvoy, who was at the time Middle and Light Heavyweight Champion of Britain. But on 17 August 1936, at Leicester rugby ground, Petersen lost to Ben Foord of South Africa in three rounds, thereby losing his British and Commonwealth Heavyweight title. This result came as major shock to his supporters.

He fought one more contest against his old enemy, Neusel. He had been due to fight Ben Foord for a second time, but when Foord withdrew because of illness Neusel stepped in. On 1 February 1937 he faced Walter Neusel in the Ring at Harringay. Although he put up a brave fight, his opponent was too strong for him and the contest was stopped in the tenth round. He was advised by a specialist to give up boxing or risk losing his sight. He therefore decided to retire at the age of only twenty-six. During his five and a half years as a professional he won thirty-three of his thirty-eight fights, nineteen by a knockout, and lost five.

During the Second World War he served in the army as a PT instructor. After the war, he played a prominent role in the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC) focusing on boxing in Wales. He was awarded the OBE in 1978 for his service to sport. In 1986 he was elected president of the BBBC, and the Board's new headquarters in south London was named 'Jack Petersen House'. He became vice-chairman of the Sports Council for Wales, and also served as a councillor for the Plasnewydd ward in Cardiff.

He married Annie Elizabeth 'Betty' Williams, the daughter of Thomas Baker Williams, a Cardiff auctioneer, on 9 October 1935. Their son David (born 1944) is a well-known sculptor.

Petersen was a very quick boxer and completely fearless. His only disadvantage was his light weight when fighting in the heavyweight category. In those days there was no weight limit for heavyweights, and Jack never reached thirteen stone even in his clothes throughout his boxing career.

Jack Petersen died of lung cancer at the Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend, on 22 November 1990 aged 79, and he was cremated at Coychurch Crematorium. He is honoured by a blue plaque on the building in St John's Square which once housed the Lynn Institute in Cardiff.

Author

Mel Williams

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Jack Petersen](#)

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