

WILDE, WILLIAM JAMES (JIMMY) (1892 - 1969), boxer, world flyweight champion (1916-23)

Name: William James Wilde
Date of birth: 1892
Date of death: 1969
Spouse: Elizabeth Wilde (née Davies)
Child: David Wilde
Child: Verdun Wilde
Parent: James Wilde
Parent: Margaret Ann Wilde (née Evans)
Gender: Male
Occupation: boxer, world flyweight champion (1916-23)
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: William Morgan Rogers

Born 12 May 1892 in Quakers Yard, Merthyr Tydfil, the son of James and Margaret Wilde. When he was four years old the family moved to 8 Station Road, Pontygwaith, Tylorstown, Rhondda, Glamorganshire. When still young he showed considerable toughness in defending himself in street fights and when he began work at the local colliery, he worked with Dai Davies, an old mountain fighter, who taught him a great deal about boxing and invited him home to practice in the attic.

When the family split, he lodged at Dai Davies's house and later married Lisbeth, his daughter. He was a frail, slight youngster, but nevertheless his ambition was to earn his living as a boxer. When he was 15 years old, he had an accident at work and was unable to walk for more than a year, waiting for his leg to heal.

He was given his first opportunity by Jack Scarrott, the owner of a boxing booth, although Jack, like others, expressed doubts about the future of someone only 5ft 2.5ins tall, who at that time weighed less than 6 stone. Throughout his unbelievable career of 864 contests (the figure most often quoted), his heaviest weight was 7st 10lb. In 1911, after persuading Ted Lewis to act as his manager, he left the pit to concentrate on a career in the professional ring. In November 1914 he won the British flyweight championship by beating Joe Symonds. In January 1915 he lost his title to Tancy Lee in the 17th round. That was the first contest he lost, but within a year he had beaten Joe Symonds to regain his title, and in January 1916 got his revenge on Tancy Lee in the 11th round. The strength carried in his two fists by a person of such light weight amazed the specialists. Quality boxing, together with perfect timing and plenty of self-confidence, rather than any hidden strength, were Wilde's usual explanations. Late in 1916, by then an army physical training instructor, he beat Young Zulu Kid from the USA in the 11th round, to win the World Flyweight Championship. The 'Mighty Atom', the 'Tylorstown Terror', the 'Indian Famine' and the 'Ghost with a hammer' had reached the top. With the war over, three-round contests were arranged between the soldiers of Britain and America. The second night he was beaten by Pal Moore, and because of the arguments that followed, a second meeting was arranged, when he won over the 20 rounds. In January 1920 he went on a boxing tour to the USA and easily beat all his opponents. In January 1921 he was beaten in the 17th round by Pete Herman of the USA. The hope was that he would retire in good time, but for £15,000 he decided to visit New York to defend his title against Pancho Villa in June 1923. He had not been near the ring for a considerable time and was beaten by Villa in the 7th round. After retiring, he was connected with several unsuccessful ventures. In 1938 he wrote his autobiography *Fighting was my business*, and was for a time the News of the World boxing correspondent.

He was ill for the last four years of his life when he lost his wife and he died, 76 yrs of age, in Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff, 11 March 1969.

Author

William Morgan Rogers, (1934 - 1999)

Sources

Personal research

Further Reading

Gareth Jones, *The boxers of Wales: Volume 3, Rhondda* (Cardiff 2021)

Wikipedia Article: [Jimmy Wilde](#)

Additional Links

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