

DIAMOND'S EXPLOITS IN THE RING LINGER ON...

WHEN Mohammed Noor bin Bahiek took his first boxing lessons at the Lion City Ring, where the Rex Theatre stands today, no one looking at him would have laid down a one-cent bet that he would one day make the grade as a top-class fighter.

Everyone laughed at the way he shadow-boxed. He had a peculiar stance and he seemed to be all elbows and knees.

Yet this gangling, dark, dedicated ring fledgling was just a few years away from making boxing headlines in the local press.

He was a frail-looking boy when he left Mecca at the age of 12 for Malaya, where he made Batu Pahat his home.

It was in nearby Muar that Macario Tionico, a well-known Filipino fight manager and trainer, picked him up to be a poster boy in a small local commercial firm. It was Tionico who also got the boy interested in the fight game — and changed his name to Joe Diamond. From this moment on, ring history was in the making.

'Spoiler'

During his 15 years as a prize fighter, Diamond, known as a "spoiler" to fighters and fans alike because of his tight defence, fought in Burma, Bangkok and Indonesia, besides Singapore, and in almost every town in Malaya until he retired in 1945.

Among the famous fighters Diamond took on were household names like Ventura Marques, Joe Eagle, Battling Guillermo, Clever Henry and Young Tarley, to name just a few.

He beat famous men like Ignacio Fernandez, Nai Sompong, Baby Johnson, Rocky Montanes, Nai Smarn, Neil Hemchit, Tiger Flowers, Chua Lai, Golden Boy, Rush Milling, Luis Blanco and a string of others.

Diamond had four great battles with Guillermo. In their first fight at the Great World Arena on Aug 18, 1934, Diamond won what was described as "one of the best fights seen in the local ring for a long time."

Battle

Fight fans were talking about that great battle between Diamond and Guillermo for the next four weeks and the promoter was forced to offer them a return bout which Diamond again won on points at the same arena on Nov. 2.

BOXING'S GOLDEN YEARS By LIM KEE CHAN



● **DIA-**MOND (left) is still very active for his age. He has been a popular participant in many long-distance walking races.

The fight was again the talk of the town...so the pair were matched for the third time on Jan 13, 1935, at the Malacca City Park.

It was a ding-dong battle and the fight ended in a draw.

But Diamond moved three-up when he scored another 10-round decision over Guillermo at the Bukit Bintang Park in Kuala Lumpur on Dec 27, 1935. Diamond, the master of defence, turned aggressor and won every round

Diamond then took on another great fighter from the Philippines, named Ignacio Fernandez.

Fernandez, besides being described as "the man with an iron jaw and a wicked right," came with a reputation of having knocked out Al Singer, of the United States, in the third round at New York's Madison Square Garden in May 1929...before Singer went on to become the world light-weight champion.

The 12-round decision Diamond gained over Fernandez at the New World Arena on Nov 28, 1936, will always be remembered for the spectacular way Diamond cut loose in the sixth round and sent the Filipino to the canvas for the first time ever in a

Singapore or Malayan ring.

This victory earned him a return fight at the same venue on Dec 26, this time with Fernandez's Malayan title on the line — and what a Boxing Day this turned out to be.

After 45 minutes of hard and furious fighting, the referee declared the bout a draw, much to the crowd's approval as they gave the two fighters a long, standing ovation when the final bell sounded.

Before his battle with Fernandez, Diamond had enjoyed a successful string of victories, having beaten the big three of the Malayan ring — Nai Sompong, the Thai knockout artist, Baby Johnson, lightweight champion of the Orient, and Ventura Marques, the great little Mexican fighter.

Against the highly-reputed Mexican feather-weight Marques, Diamond put on a brilliant exhibition of boxing to win at the New World Arena in January, 1936.

One of the judges gave the fight to Diamond, the other to Marques, while referee F.C. Johnson gave his casting vote to Diamond.

Against Johnson, the colourful Filipino, Diamond fought what was recorded as his best fight of his career when he won after 12 rounds of superb boxing by both fighters at the Olympic Stadium on Feb 14, 1936.

"Joe was magnificent. His defence was almost impeccable and he made full use of his superior height and reach," the Malayan Tribune, an afternoon paper, reported.

That victory earned him the right to challenge for the Filipino's Orient lightweight title two weeks later — but this time Johnson was too cunning and fought an entirely different battle for 12 rounds to keep his belt.

Biggest

Diamond's biggest victory was, perhaps, over Sompong, the cage of Bangkok, who had strung together a remarkable run of knockout victories, since he set foot here — until Diamond stopped it.

Diamond, described as "Mr Defence of the Malayan ring," kept a solid wall up and forced a draw against the Thai welterweight champion.

After stopping Sompong's string of knockout victories, Diamond also ended the Thai's winning streak three weeks later when he fought a clever battle to outpoint the Thai at the New World on July 30.

Diamond's last fight was when he lost an unpopular decision to Filipino Battling Sima in April, 1945.

Diamond now lives in Singapore and is still very active for his age. He has been a popular participant in many long-distance walking races.

BOXING'S GOLDEN YEARS

By LIM KEE CHAN

'Key' never quit even when chips were down

“I love boxing and I am prepared to die fighting in the ring.”

AMID deafening cheers from the capacity crowd at the Federated Malay States godown on the night of August 4, 1922, Tan Teng Kee was crowned the professional light-weight champion of

Malaya.

Better known as "Battling Key", the colourful Singaporean had just disposed of his arch rival, Eddie Grady, in a fight cross to the jaw followed up by a left hook into the stomach in exactly 35 seconds of the first round.

That was only the beginning of the Battling Key story. Key was an overnight hit and his name became a household word. He was later described as the Georges Carpentier of the East (Carpentier, a Frenchman, was the world light-heavyweight champion in 1920). Key had the same style of putting out his opponents.

Reputation

Reputed as the best dressed boxer, Key was a fighter who spent his money as fast as he made it. He was one of the biggest box office draws and had to live up to his reputation.

When Key took up boxing as a professional in 1921, many of his friends tried to talk him out of it. Boxing had always been regarded by a lot of people as a brutal sport, and his friends wanted him to have a less painful way of making a living.

But his reply was: "I love boxing and I am prepared to die fighting in the ring."

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And this prophecy came true 14 years later. Key died with his gloves on.

Born on Sept 28, 1898, Key was educated in Singapore at St Joseph's Institution and the Anglo Chinese School. He started boxing at a Selegie Road gymnasium.

The man who first took an interest in Key was a J. F. Pestana, then manager of the Alhambra Theatre in Beach Road. Pestana has a well known fight manager and promoter.

Confidence

Key was later managed by John Oei and had explicit confidence and loyalty in the man.

Key had great battles in Singapore and Malaya, but he fought some of his best fights during his campaign in Manila, Hongkong, Indonesia (then known as Java), Saigon and Bangkok.

Some of the big names he defeated in Singapore and Malaya were veteran Eddie Grady, Claude de Rozario, Amin Rusher, Noel Moreno and A. Orsul.

He also had many memorable fights with men like Young Pelky, Tenetra Santos, Dommy Santos, Cowboy Reyes, Andre Dupre, Fighting Surbitto, Vincent Pereira, Battling Guillermo and another great local Chinese, Y. C. Song.

In his 14 years of trading punches, Key earned something like \$50,000 — big money in his time.

Key fought Carvalho three times. In their first meeting in April 1922, Carvalho, reputed to be a knockout artist, found Key too crafty and lost convincingly over six rounds.

Two years later, Carvalho, also described as the "Johore Tiger" avenged his defeat after a hectic 10-round battle at the Victoria Theatre before a

To prove who was the best lightweight in Malaya, promoters matched the two for the lightweight championship at the FMC Godown on Aug. 4, 1922.

This time, Key proved the issue beyond doubt when he set a terrific pace from the opening bell and forced Carvalho to the ropes repeatedly.

As Key caught Carvalho on the jaw with the right, and hooked into the stomach with the left, the "Johore Tiger" sank to the canvas for the full count. The fight lasted 95 seconds.

Key toured the Philippines not long after that and made a sensational debut when he knocked out Kid Apache in the second round on May 19, 1923.

Key fought Eddie Grady, a balding Englishman, at the Stadium on March 17, 1923, the wily Grady had to make full use of his experience to last out his younger opponent's onslaught.

Gallant

Key won, but Grady was applauded for his gallant display.

Grady levelled the score with Key in the return fight at the Happy Valley on June 6, 1924, and then went one up over the local fighter at the same venue on Oct 3, 1924, winning both occasions on points.

A fortnight later, Key stopped Claude de Rozario, the featherweight champion who was out to put himself in line for a crack for the lightweight title.

It was obvious that Rozario was out for an early knockout as he tore

in from the start keeping Key on the defensive. But Key, played for time.

In the third round, Key floored Rozario twice, before the bell came to his aid. Rozario appeared to be staggering and his seconds threw in the towel.

Key's battle with hard-hitting Filipino Young Pelky took place at the New World Arena on Oct. 13, 1923. The fight was billed as the "Battle of the Keys", and ringside seats, normally sold for \$5 were hiked to \$10, and despite that there was a full house.

Too strong

Key gave away seven kilograms, but he was game until the seasoned Filipino knocked him out in the eighth round.

Key had been floored three times in the seventh round and was saved by the bell.

It was obvious by the eighth round that the Filipino was too strong. A left hook sent the Singaporean down for the full count.

Pelky left for the United States soon after and made a big hit there fighting as Lope Tenorio.

Another Filipino who made a big name in the States after his campaign in Singapore was Cowboy Reyes who had three fights with Key.

Key was outpointed in their first fight over 10 rounds at the Happy Valley on Aug. 12, 1924.

In the return fight on Sept. 12, 1924, Key put up a much-improved performance and held the classy Filipino to a draw. But Reyes scored another points victory over the local fighter on Jan 2, 1925.

Then began the slide to oblivion for Key. He seemed to lose his sting.

On Oct. 10, 1929, Key took a beating from Battling Guillermo, a Filipino. The fight was held at the New World Moonlight Hall. In the ninth round, the referee stopped the fight in favour of the Filipino.

The late Matthew de Souza, a boxing aficionado once wrote: "I was among the crowd and as I

watched the fight, my eyes were full of tears for a great friend who was a great idol of thousands only a few years ago."

Key was stopped again by Guillermo in the third round in their second meeting at the Suan S'ruk Stadium in Bangkok on Jan. 31, 1931.

Fighting Choo, a local boxer, also stopped Key at the New World Arena on Sept. 2, 1932. Choo's first blow had Key down for a count of five. Key hit the deck nine more times before he was stopped.

On Jan. 30, 1932, Pat Reading handed Key an severe beating before stopping him in the second round at the New World Arena.

Long count

Key took the long count when he decided to make a comeback after a long layoff. The venue: Merryland Park in Seremban. The date: Mar 20, 1935. The opponent: Jimmy Nelson.

Key started off well and was fighting impressively in the early rounds. Then a light glancing blow from Nelson hit Key on the chin in the fifth round. Key sank to the canvas, but sprang immediately to his feet.

In the next round, Nelson had Key down again with a right hook to the face, but the bell rang in the nick of time.

Key returned to his corner looking exhausted. He was unable to continue.

As the bell rang for round seven, Key got up from his stool and collapsed. He was rushed to hospital where he died without regaining consciousness.

**Next week:
Y. C. SONG**

Song did not believe in BOXING'S GOLDEN YEARS second-best performance

AFTER watching a boxing promotion at the Happy Valley open-air stadium one night, Yeo Choong Song, a strapping young boy, turned to his friends and said, without a trace of a boast: "I think I can beat most of those boxers."

This remark would have passed into nothingness, as such bravado talk by the young usually does, but not this time. One of the friends took Choon Song seriously and brought him along to meet a boxing manager named Tan Ngee Yong at the latter's River Valley Road home the following morning.

That was the unlikely beginning of the boxing career for Y. C. Song, who later ruled the featherweights and lightweights in Singapore and Malaya during the mid-1920s and early 1930s.

Fighters

Besides Song, Ngee Yong also managed well-known fighters like Teddy Heng, Joe Lim, Battling Kwi and several other top local professionals.

Those who remember Song will recall his great battles with top Filipino fighters like Speedy Dado, Joe Mate, Joe Mendiola, Battling Guillermo and Clever Mauro, including his sensational knock-out victory over Cowboy Reyes.

Dado, Mate and Reyes later went on and made a big name for themselves in the United States.

Then there were never-to-be-forgotten battles against local greats like Battling Key and Amin Rusher, Young Johnson from Selangor, the Japanese Sherlock Warren and Chua Lai from Shanghai.

Song became the successor to the great Battling Key against whom he had three hectic battles before taking the lightweight title from him.

Song turned professional in 1924 and won his first fight on points over Boy Lim and then went on a good run of victories for about 20 fights in just over a year.

He then moved up from four-rounders to do battle over eight rounds before he finally had his big break.

Cowboy Reyes stopped over in Singapore on his way to the US in 1925 and Song almost sent him back to the Philippines when he knocked the Cowboy out in the eighth round with a powerful left-hook to the body.

In June, 1926, Song was already a big hit ... and his forthcoming fight against Filipino Speedy Dado at the Happy Valley had the fans buzzing in anticipation.

Song was doing well until the eighth round when a stupid act by one of the seconds cost him the bout.

The referee, D. Robinson, had stopped the round mid-way to tighten the laces of Dado's gloves. As he was doing this, one of Song's seconds jumped into the ring and started rubbing down the local fighter's body with a towel. Under the rules, there was only one thing the referee could do — Song was immediately disqualified.

But this setback only spurred Song on and he gave a superb display of classy boxing when he outpointed Mohammed Amin Rusher in the rain over 12 rounds at the Happy Valley on Dec 2, 1927.

Forcing the pace from the opening bell, Song opened up a cut over Amin's left eye and was scoring heavily.

The rain poured down in the seventh round and made the ring slippery and difficult for both fighters, but, despite the downpour, the fans were on their feet cheering the two fighters right up to the final bell.

Though Song had won, Amin was also given a grand ovation for his gallant performance.

The first Song versus Battling Key clash came on Aug 27, 1927, also at the Happy Valley.

Key was then the lightweight champion of Malaya.

Old cut

Song, conceding six pounds to Key, was boxing confidently until the eighth round when an old face cut reopened and the blood poured out.

Though Key concentrated on that cut, Song had

done enough in the previous rounds to hang on ... and he received a tremendous cheer from the capacity crowd as his hands were raised in victory.

Another large crowd braved threatening weather on March 4, 1928, to watch the return fight between Song and Key at the same venue.

Song once again entertained the thousands with his dazzling speed and power punching ... until Key opened up the same cut over Song's eye in the eighth round.

This time Song was not so lucky ... for the referee stopped the fight after examining the damage and awarded the fight to Key.

Key's title was put on the line when the pair met for the third time. The place: New World Arena. The date: Oct 5, 1928.

Song was once again the much lighter of the two, giving away about

six pounds. This, however, did not seem to bother him as he ducked through the ropes with a confident look.

Then he went into battle with his fast fists against a ring idol who seemed to wilt under the barrage of blows. It was a happy night for Song who won easily ... but it seemed to be the beginning of the end for the career of Key.

Joe Mendiola, described as the "Tiger from Manila," invaded the Singapore rings and created a

big impression when he stopped Boy Walley, one of the local greats who had just returned from a successful tour of the US.

Song was matched against Mendiola on Aug 30, 1930. The hard-hitting Filipino proved too powerful for Song and kept piling up points with his effective left hook to the body which appeared to take a lot out of the Malayan champion.

In the eighth round, Mendiola lived up to his jungle image and sprang

from his corner at the moment the bell sounded. He hit Song from one corner of the ring to another. Song could only cover-up and pray.

Suddenly a left swing caught Song flush on the jaw. Mendiola followed this up with a lightning



● SONG ... with picture of himself in younger days.

The Sunday Times, April 26, 1981

SUNDAY TIMES SPORT

right and left to the face. Song went down for the full count.

But Song was far from finished where boxing was concerned. He next put up two stirring battles against Battling Guillermo, another top-ranked Filipino.

Their first fight at the New World Arena on Aug 8, 1929, was recorded as one of the best bouts of Song's career.

After sizing up each other for the first two rounds, the battle heated up when both went for each other with every

punch in the book — and Song proved slightly the better.

By the ninth, Guillermo must have sensed that he was behind and tried to make up the deficit.

But Song, fighting with full confidence by this

time, gave the Filipino no chance to move ahead and kept his lead right to the final bell ending the 10th round for a popular win.

Five years later, at the Great World arena on the night of Sept 28, 1934,

Guillermo avenged his defeat by Song with a sensational first-round knock-out.

He had a few more unimportant fights — then hung up his gloves. Song had given local boxing all he had, and this was a lot. If he could not continue to give the fans the slick skill they had come to expect from him, he was not going to give them second-best performances.

So ended the career of a proud and gifted local boxer.

By LIM KEE CHAN



LIM KEE CHAN

© LIM ...in 1952 when he fought Sam See



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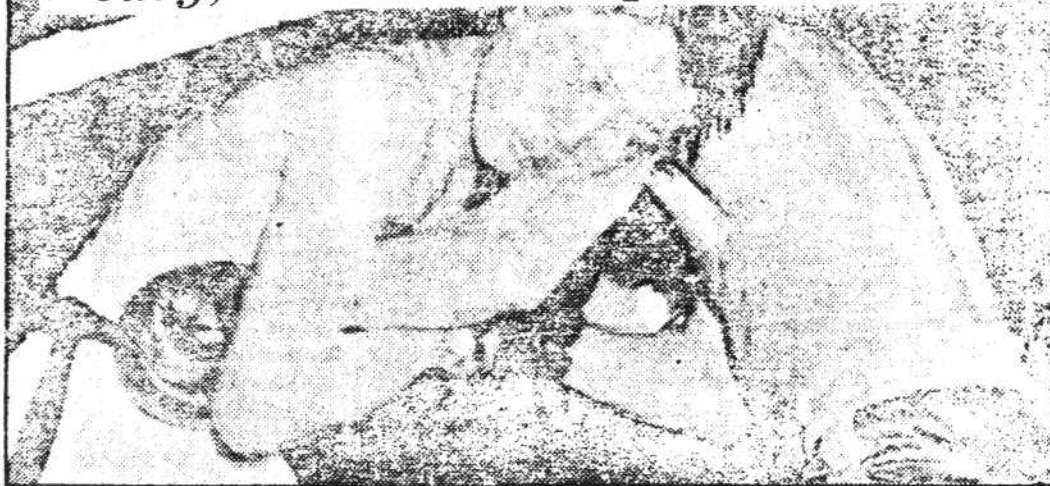
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Weary, but Lim keeps on fighting



A WEARY Lim Kee Chan rests his head on the shoulder of Pierre Cossemyns during a spell of in-fighting in their 10-round bout on Sunday which Cossemyns won on points.— Straits Times picture.

MUCH PRAISE FOR KEE CHAN'S GRIT

He's put Colony on boxing map

THE COURAGE which Lim Kee Chan showed in his 10-round battle against the world's fourth best bantamweight, Pierre Cossemyns, in Singapore on Sunday night has won him a good deal of admiration.



The crowd cheered him throughout the fight.

Lim Kee Chan, who had been called up to the world-class ranks by Britain and all his fury.

Lim Kee Chan's will to fight back against a man clearly superior in strength and skill will probably not be matched again in a Singapore ring for a long time to come.

Cossemyns paid this tribute to Kee Chan: "I never expected to come up against such a good boxer in Singapore. With more experience he will be a match for the best. I admire him. He is a clean fighter with a great fighting heart."

So Malaya may have a world prospect at last, though the way ahead for Kee Chan—who has suddenly found himself Singapore's pride—will not be easy.

Confident

He does not expect it to be easy but he has shown that he has the confidence and determination to face whatever may come.

Big things are being planned for Kee Chan, who until he climbed out of the ring on Sunday night with a smile on his battered face, had been regarded as "just another fighter."

When I congratulated him on his magnificent display in his dressing room he smiled and muttered through his swollen lips: "I did my best, but it was not good enough. I did not let Singapore down, did I?" he asked.

No, Kee Chan, you were tops from start to finish! — R.M.

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