



# Sam Langford: Boxing's Greatest Uncrowned Champion

*Clay Moyle*

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## **Sam Langford: Boxing's Greatest Uncrowned Champion** Clay Moyle

Standing no more than 5' 7" tall, Sam Langford was one of the 20th century's greatest fighters. In 1951, the great featherweight champion Abe Attell was asked if Sugar Ray Robinson was the best of all time, either as a welterweight or middleweight. He named Stanley Ketchel as the greatest welterweight he'd ever seen and said that, as for the middleweights, he'd take Sam Langford, "the greatest of them all at that poundage." Remarkably, the man Attell felt was the greatest middleweight fighter in history fought and defeated many of the leading heavyweight contenders of his day. Over time, he matured physically and grew into a light heavyweight, then began fighting heavyweights on a regular basis, but he was almost always the much smaller of the two combatants. Nat Fleischer, founding editor of The Ring magazine, called Sam one of the hardest punchers of all time, and ranked the little man seventh among his personal all-time favorites "Sam was endowed with everything. He possessed strength, agility, cleverness, hitting power, a good thinking cap, and an abundance of courage He feared no one. But he had the fatal gift of being too good, and that's why he often had to give away weight in early days and make agreements with opponents. Many of those who agreed to fight him, especially of his own race, wanted an assurance that he would be merciful or insisted on a bout of not more than six rounds." Other leading sportswriters of that era had even higher opinions of Sam. Hype Igoe, well known boxing writer for the New York Journal, proclaimed Sam the greatest fighter, pound-for-pound, who ever lived. Joe Williams, respected sports columnist of the New York World Telegram wrote that Langford was probably the best the ring ever saw, and the great Grantland Rice described Sam as "about the best fighting man I've ever watched." At the time of Sam's induction into the Boxing Hall of Fame (October 1955) he was the only non-champion accorded the honor. Many ring experts considered Sam the greatest pound-for-pound fighter in the history of boxing Under different circumstances he might have been a champion at five different weights: lightweight; welterweight, middleweight; light heavyweight; and heavyweight. Blind and penniless at the end of his life, Sam lived quietly in a private nursing home But when one visitor expressed sympathy for his circumstances, Sam replied, "Don't nobody need to feel sorry for old Sam. I had plenty of good times. I been all over the world. I fought maybe 600 fights, and every one was a pleasure!" With 98 photographs and illustrations, primarily from private collections.

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