

JIM WOODS – *Gentle Man, Champion Boxer.*

Judith Lewis

They referred to him as *the gentle giant*. Some said he lacked the killer instinct to become a great boxer. He fought in an era when boxing had yet to be tainted by greedy corrupt entrepreneurs, by fighters who bit ears. Boxing was a popular sport throughout the country. At the Parramatta Stadium, the *Rivoli*, you could watch forty rounds of boxing – a main bout of ten rounds, a six round bout and six further bouts of four rounds for the

Popular Prices: 4/-, 3/-, 2/- (plus tax)

LADIES 2/- TO ALL PARTS

In Riverstone Aub Gillespie had a backyard gym in Railway Terrace (now West Parade). Locals involved in boxing were to include Arthur Luland, George Cafe and Colin Clarke, a National Lightweight Champion.

When you talk with Jim Woods you are impressed by his humility: “*No, I never won anything major.*” Yet the local press, after his fight against Norrie Bell at Newcastle on 28th June 1952, stated ...*a good fight by two good sportsmen. Woods is a good crowd pleaser and a topclass fighter.* The *Singapore Press*, in October 1952, labelled him *Australia’s best heavyweight today.*

Jim Woods was the last boxer to fight Dave Sands who, between 1946 and 1952 held the Australian Middleweight, Light-Heavyweight and Heavyweight Championships and the British Empire Middleweight Championship. Sands was killed in a truck accident at Dungog on 11th August 1952. The fight between Woods and Sands, at Wagga Wagga on 9th July 1952, was for the Australian Heavyweight Championship. Jim Woods was knocked out in the fourth round.

Jim Woods was born on 23rd January, 1928. His parents were George and Margaret. George worked on a dairy at Enfield. As urban Sydney expanded, the Woods’ family moved to Blacktown. Jim was 18 months old. George and Margaret had four children whilst living at Enfield – Hilda, born in 1922, George, Ethel and Jim. George died at age three, Ethel at age six. At Blacktown they had two more daughters, June, born in 1931 and Margaret in 1936.

Jim went to school at Blacktown Public School and did his secondary schooling at Westmead Boys' Technical High School. Before and after school each day Jim helped his father on the farm. Jim was fourteen years and eight months when the family moved to Marsden Park to run a poultry farm.

On the same day the family moved to Marsden Park Jim got himself a job at Riverstone Meatworks in the Casings (commonly called *the Gut Shed*) Section, underneath the Mutton Board. As Jim tells it, *At the meatworks, a bloke gave me a hiding. Sid Parkes said, "Come down to Billy Teale's at Parramatta and learn how to box"*. Billy Teale, a former Riverstone resident, had been the Army's Heavyweight Boxing Champion in World War 1 and had a 'gym' set up in the back room of his Parramatta home.

Jim's first fight was in an amateur tournament in what was supposed to be the Novice Section, but which turned out to be the Open Section. The fight was at Lidcombe against Bluey Edwardson. Jim won in the fourth round. This fight was followed by two more Lidcombe bouts, both resulting in knockout wins to Jim in the first round. Then followed a loss in four rounds at Blacktown, a win in the fourth, a knockout in the second and a win in the sixth round, all at Auburn.

After seven amateur fights Jim turned professional and fought Max Ballard at Auburn on 23rd February 1948, winning in the fourth round. In the five years that followed Jim was to have 51 more fights at venues including Leichhardt, Ryde, Newcastle, Auburn, St Marys, Parramatta, Sydney, Nambucca Heads, Melbourne, Wagga Wagga, Gloucester and finally Singapore. Of his 52 professional fights Jim was to win 33, 16 of them by knockouts. In his 19 losses he was to be knocked out six times.

For his first 20 fights Jim was trained by Mick Lawrence whose gym was in a building at Blacktown Showground. Jim used to ride his bike from Marsden Park to train. When it was raining Jim's friend from Marsden Park, Don Whiting, would come to Jim's house to box with him.

Mick Lawrence gave up training boxers to train trotters and his brother Billy became Jim's trainer/manager from his *spacious Woodville Road gym at Merrylands*. Like Jim, Lawrence was a meatworker, but at Homebush Abattoirs. Lawrence had an impressive stable of fighters which included *Colin Clarke, National Lightweight Champion and Trevor King, State Lightweight Champion*.

A fight at Newcastle on 30th June 1951, which he lost on points in the twelfth round, against local Alfie Sands, brother of Dave, is the one Jim remembers as his best. *Jim Woods ... regarded as having little chance of staying more than six rounds ... after one of the gamest displays seen at the stadium was still there at the end of the twelfth, when Sands got a points verdict*.

The Australian Jack Dempsey was a fighter who gave Jim a lot of good advice. Jim fought Dempsey once, on 22nd October 1951 at Sydney Stadium. Dempsey's eye was cut when the two clashed heads and Jim was awarded the fight, by Referee Patrick, on a TKO in round six.

On 9th April of that year Jim fought the preliminary bout before the Dave Sands (Australia) v. Henry Brimm (America) main event at Sydney Stadium. Jim's opponent was *dynamic but crude* Latvian migrant Emil Berjinski, a railway fettler stationed at Chullora Camp who was *fighting to buy a home for his wife*. The crowd that night was in the vicinity of 12,000. The newspapers reported as follows, *Berjinski threw everything but the ring posts at Woods in the sixth However, on the night Woods knew just a little too much, and by boxing coolly earned the pat of Referee Patrick at the concluding bell. Both boxers earned a shower of coins amounting to almost £6 for their efforts but they certainly earned it.*

As well as local opponents Jim won a twelfth round points decision against Fijian Henry Braye on 17th February 1952 at Newcastle. *A stout fighting-heart backed by a copybook left hand, won a well-deserved victory for Jim Woods.* Braye had been lined up to fight Dave Sands for the Heavyweight Championship of Australia. He pulled out and Jim Woods accepted the challenge. On the 1st March Jim defeated Italian Ubaldo Giometti, a former heavyweight champion of the Orient, on a TKO in the eighth round.

Of his fight against Dave Sands, Jim says he was completely outclassed by Sands. *"He went easy on me. He carried me through those four rounds."* The newspapers reported *Sands won the fight with a short right hand punch that crashed on to Woods' jaw, and the Sydney boxer sprawled helplessly on the canvas. He received attention from an ambulance officer before he was able to rise to his feet.* For this fight Jim was guaranteed a purse of £100.

After Dave Sands' death Jim was offered a number of fights. His next fight was against Fred Riddell at Sydney Stadium in a Benefit Night for Dave Sands' widow. Riddell had won eleven of his last twelve fights and was five to one favourite to win this one. Jim recalls, *"Riddell was a southpaw. He had hit me very hard. Billy Lawrence, my second, said to go out and hit him with a left hook. I did. It knocked him out."* (in round six). The night raised £350 for the widow. Woods and Riddell *received £60 each after they had given half their purse to the fund.*

A week later, on 11th September at Leichhardt, Jim Woods was to defeat Irish Middleweight Champion, Jackie Wilson, who trained *on the "Orcades" as conditions on the ship were better than those offering on land*, with a knockout in the tenth round. Then, on 19th September, in Melbourne, Jim was to lose in twelve rounds to Englishman Ken Brady, who went on to win the Heavyweight Championship of Australia in his next fight.

Jim's first overseas' fight, at Happy World Stadium in Singapore on 17th October 1952, was also his last. Jim was up against Fijian and Orient light-heavyweight champion, Isimeli Radrodro, who also represented Fiji in Rugby Union. *Both weighed 12.3 and thrilled the onlookers with their clean fighting, Woods being applauded for his effort against his formidable opponent.*

Watched by more than 6000 holidaymakers Jim was knocked out in the ninth round of the ten round fight and says he fought the fight “*on blackout or memory*”.

More than 100 members of a Fijian Battalion fighting communist terrorists in Malaya immediately jumped into the ring and celebrated “Sergeant Radrodro’s victory” with a war song. Carrying banjos they had travelled more than 200 miles from their camp.

When Woods was knocked down by Radrodro his head hit the ring boards. He was removed unconscious to hospital where he recovered the following morning....

Woods told the Free Press that he has decided to hang up his gloves for good and help his mother with her chicken farm ‘back home’--.

Jim was true to his word. In 1956 he married Ila McKinnon. This long marriage ended in divorce and in 1993 he married Doris Talbot (Vissochi). Doris and Jim had ‘gone out together’ in their younger days. Although Doris and Jim are now separated they remain good friends. Jim has always been close to his sisters, particularly June (Evans) and Margaret (Walsh) who live in Riverstone, and is very fond of June’s children, Lesley, Kaylene, Darren and Scott and their families.

Jim Woods was a champion boxer, he *was* and *is* a gentle man.