Swords In Two Cities

The two physical giants, handsome in fencing attire, waited impatiently at opposite ends of the field. More than a thousand sports-loving Orleanians had gathered on this Sunday afternoon to witness the fight which they had seen so widely advertised in the newspapers and on placards:

Mounted Sword Combat
For Championship
Open to Watch
Duncan C. Ross vs.
Capt. Jas. C. Daly
Contest to Finish
Admission 25-50c
Sportsman's Park

The competitors, Daly and Ross, were just two of the professional fighters of the 1880's who traveled from city to city sponsoring events like this one. Although the rivalry in these matches was often wildly fabricated, the revenue from the bouts was genuine and impressive! The men were excellent athletes, trained wrestlers and swordsmen, who would take on any challengers.

"Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta." The master of ceremonies sounded the bangle. Ross's steed, eager for the fray, spurred forward with little insistence. Daly's horse was timid and immediately began wheeling nervously, a trait which could place an expert rider like Daly at a disadvantage. Furthermore, rain had softened the ground. The horses feet sank deep into mud as they galloped across the park's expanse.

Swords clashed as combatants and steeds met. Ross swiped Daly across the back when his opponent's skittish horse wheeled. Round two ended with Ross scoring another point in the same manner.

The third bout involved much striking and parrying on the part of both men, and Daly scored by a parry in fierce across Ross's breastplate. By round six, the fight was becoming a heated affair with the men fighting at the closest of quarters. The petty horseplay had ended, and the crowd sensed a new fierceness in both Ross and Daly. The awarding of rounds went back and forth. Ross took number six and seven; Daly took eight, nine and ten, but Ross came back heatedly to take round 11.

At the beginning of round 12, even the horses seemed angered at each other as they circled around, squealing and rearing, drawing chilly air into their nostrils and blowing out steam. Ross broke the circle pattern and galloped away with Daly in pursuit. Horses and riders seemed to fly around the park. Mud and water splashed behind them. Both riders tore into the center of the park, and as Daly passed Ross, he hit his back. This scored point angered Ross, who rushed up and struck three tremendous blows across Daly's back, almost cleaving through the armor.

Daly, enraged, wheeled his horse to face Ross and swung at him furiously. The desperate combat caused a referee to run between the two men to try and separate them. At that moment, Daly vaulted from his horse to rush at his opponent, but Ross thundered off. The police seized Daly, and a sergeant ordered the contest to cease. Both men were forced to leave the field, much to the excited crowd's dismay.

Each man had scored six points. The referee proclaimed that because the fight had been stopped by police interference, it should be continued at a later date. That night, the referee and subdued gladiators decided to continue their battle in Galveston, Tex., the following week.

In Galveston, Ross and Daly were joined by two other athletes, Sergeant Walsh and the popular Capt. Gaston, who proposed to wrestle in that city on the same Sunday program. The afternoon exhibition went off more smoothly than the one in New Orleans, with Ross as the victor. However, peace between the four men was short-lived.

The division of the gate receipts brought about a squabble. Ross claimed 40 per cent of the receipts as his share of the day, since he organized the rematch. After deducting 40 per cent more for the Beach Park Association, which furnished their facilities, only 20 per cent of the take remained for division among the other contestants.

When Gaston and Walsh protested vigorously, Ross brandished a pistol and threatened Gaston's life!

Back in New Orleans, the following day's sports pages screamed the headline, "Ross And His Party Arrested In Galveston." Each of the athletes was charged with violating Sunday laws in that city and was marched to the county jail by a squad of mounted police. Ross was arrested on two other charges, one preferred by Gaston for threatening his life; the other by Gaston, Walsh, and Daly, claiming Ross was guilty of swindling in dividing gate receipts!

But, two days later, Ross was acquitted. The receipts to Sunday's exhibition were more than $300, and the court ruled Ross, for promoting the event, was entitled to more than just a participant's share. Thus, Walsh, Daly and Gaston remained in jail until they were able to secure bail. Ross, on the other hand, emerged as the champion of the day in both combat and litigation!