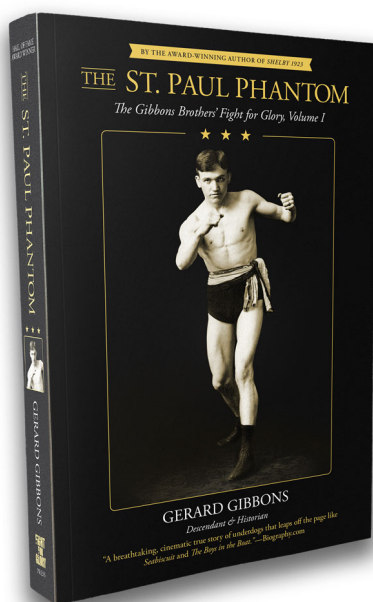


Issue 169 March 2026

BOOK REVIEW by Clay Moyle, IBRO

THE ST. PAUL PHANTOM
The Gibbons Brothers' Fight for Glory, Volume I
By Gerard Gibbons



It is hard to believe that it took this long for someone to produce a biography of the great middleweight boxer Mike Gibbons, the legendary “St. Paul Phantom.” It is even more difficult to imagine a more qualified or capable author for the task than his great-nephew, Gerard Gibbons. Had anyone else attempted it, the result would almost certainly pale in comparison to this exceptional work.

THE ST. PAUL PHANTOM is a masterclass in writing a sports biography. Gerard Gibbons seamlessly combines meticulous historical research with the intimate heart of a family memoir to bring this book vividly to life. This is not merely a boxing story; it is a gripping, beautifully told piece of American history—one that will resonate with both devoted students of the sport and readers drawn to richly human narratives.

Gerard is an accomplished nonfiction author, storyteller, producer, and historian. His more than thirty years as an award-winning filmmaker uniquely equip him to tell this story with clarity, depth, and narrative momentum. His personal connection to the subject further enriches the book.

His grandfather, Tommy Gibbons—an outstanding heavyweight fighter in his own right—was Mike’s younger brother. Throughout Gerard’s life, his father, Tommy Jr., shared vivid stories of his famous relatives’ lives and adventures. Before his death in 1999, Tommy Jr. left Gerard more than a dozen sealed cardboard boxes filled with century-old newspaper clippings, photographs, souvenirs, family diaries, memoirs, scrapbooks, and love letters. This remarkable archive forms the backbone of a deeply authentic biography, resurrecting these oft-overlooked maestros of the sweet science, two of the twentieth-century’s greatest boxing brothers, referred to by late, great IBRO member JJ Johnston as “the shining knights of the ring.”

It is rare for a boxing biography to capture a fighter’s soul outside the ring, but Gerard Gibbons has done exactly that. Those are the stories I value most, and this book hits every mark. Drawing from extraordinary primary sources and exhaustive research, Gerard crafts a portrait that is both emotionally resonant and historically rigorous. He proves himself to be an ace researcher, a fine writer, and—most importantly—a superb storyteller.

Readers will come away with a far deeper appreciation for the Hall of Fame Gibbons brothers, not only for their achievements in the ring, but for the lives they led and the influence they exerted beyond it. They were true students of the game. I especially enjoyed learning about their time spent sharing knowledge of their craft with legends such as Jack Johnson, Joe Gans, and Sam Langford, their storied battles with Jimmy Clabby, Packey McFarland, Harry Greb, Eddie McGoorty, and Mike O’Dowd, as well as the profound influence of *The Art of War* on the brothers’ approach to boxing, strategy, and life.

The book also explores, in compelling detail, Mike Gibbons’ significant contributions to America’s World War I efforts—particularly his work training soldiers in boxing, hand-to-hand combat and bayonet fighting. This often-overlooked period of history, compounded by the horrifying impacts of the 1918 global pandemic, adds meaningful dimension to his legacy and underscores the breadth of his impact beyond the sport.

Rather than reveal too much, I will simply say that *The St. Paul Phantom* is a superb achievement. It is a moving exploration of family, legacy, and the world beyond the ring. I give this book my highest recommendation and eagerly await the author’s forthcoming work on the life and times of his grandfather, Tommy Gibbons, that Gerard promises will receive a similar treatment.

Readers who appreciate deeply engaging storytelling should also seek out Gerard’s earlier work, *Shelby 1923: The Dempsey–Gibbons Fight for Glory and a Little Montana Town’s Impossible Dream*, a beautifully illustrated, full-color companion piece. A treasure worth having on its own right.

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