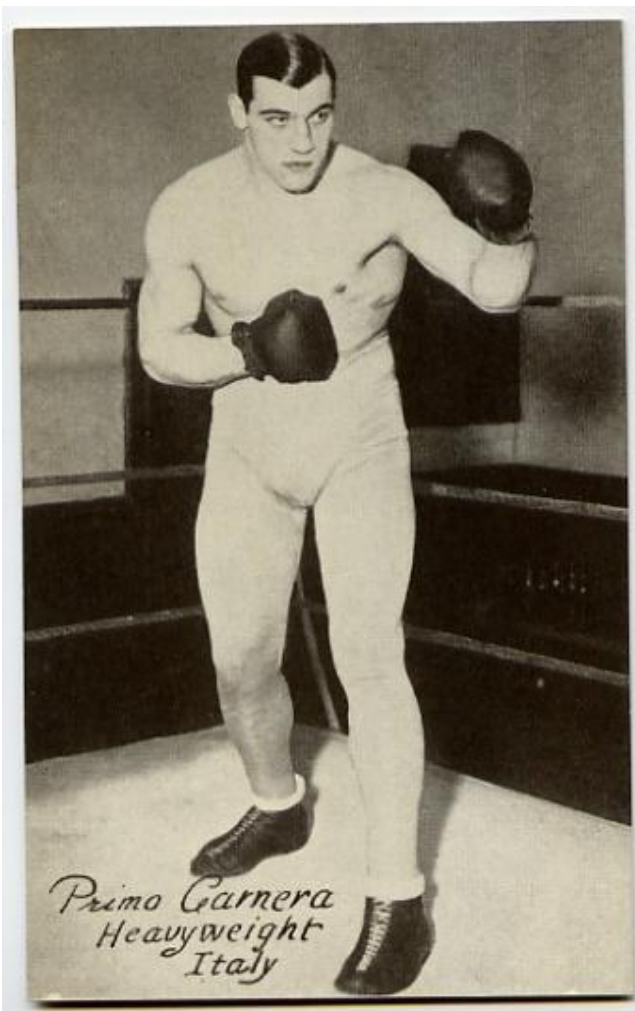


# The Boxing Biographies Newsletter

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**Name:** Primo Carnera

**Career Record:** [click](#)

**Alias:** The Ambling Alp

**Nationality:** Italian

**Birthplace:** Sequals, Italy

**Hometown:** Sequals, Italy

**Born:** 1906-10-25

**Died:** 1967-06-29

**Age at Death:** 60

**Stance:** Orthodox

**Height:** 6' 5"

**Reach:** 85" inches

**Managers:** [Leon See](#), [Frank Churchill](#), [Billy Duffy](#), [Walter Friedman](#)

## Overview

Today, **Primo Carnera** is a side note in the annals of boxing history, regarded more as a bizarre phenom than an actual person. The surface story most commonly recited about Carnera is that he was a freakishly big and unbelievably naïve Italian circus performer discovered and exploited by New York mobsters who fixed fights for him and protected him into the heavyweight championship. In the end, the gangsters abandoned him, stripped him of his cash,

and let him disappear back into anonymity. Ironically, most of the classic story is true, only in a much less simple manner. Primo seems to have been an intelligent man, entirely aware that he was being exploited by less than savory business partners, but happy to return the favor by getting as much from them as he could while he could. Culturally and historically, Primo is important for being one of the heavyweights who helped keep the sport alive after the retirement

of [Jack Dempsey](#) and during the bleak trials of the Great Depression. He proved to be a thrilling curiosity for the public who set attendance records just to see him flatten overmatched local pugs. In this way he reflected the circumstances and outlook of the world during the Great Depression and the second World War.

## **Early Years**

Born on October 26, 1906, in Sequals, a village to the northeast of Naples, Carnera spent much of his childhood training to be a carpenter. At fourteen he moved on his own to France, where he worked as various menial jobs until joining a traveling circus as a “strong man” at sixteen. After leaving the circus two years later, he was noticed by French boxer [Paul Journée](#), who approached Primo about starting a boxing career. Introducing Primo to promoter [Léon See](#), Journée agreed to become Primo’s trainer, and See his manager. Thus Primo appeared in his first prizefight on September 12, 1928 in Paris, France, against the more experienced [Leon Sebilo](#).

Though looking every bit the cumbersome novice, Carnera still managed to annihilate Sebilo in two rounds. He won twice more before See took him on the road, displaying his gigantic boxer in Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and England against hand-picked, pushover opponents. Carnera won fourteen of his first fifteen bouts, eleven by knockout, but had yet to face a name opponent.

That changed on November 18, 1929, at the Royal Albert Hall in London, where Primo was matched with [Young Stribling](#), a future hall of famer and already a veteran of more than two hundred and fifty prizefights. Though he outweighed his opponent by nearly one hundred pounds, Carnera was badly exposed before the large crowd by the clever Stribling. Using body punches and constant movement, the smaller fighter made the bigger man look clumsy and ridiculous. Though Carnera managed to score a flash knockdown in the third, Stribling returned the favor in the same round and was clearly taking a lead on the scorecards. Then, in the fourth, Carnera went down again, claiming that he had been punched below the belt. The referee subsequently disqualified Stribling, to the disapproval of most he viewed the match. Later historians have speculated that this fight may have been fixed. Less than a month later, the pair got in the ring once more to settle the issue, this time at the Velodrome d’Hiver in Paris. Again Stribling boxed himself to an obvious early lead. But, after the bell rang ending the seventh round and the smaller fighter was making his way to his corner, the big Italian landed a haymaker blow to the back of his opponent’s head. Stribling collapsed to the canvas and was declared the winner by disqualification while unconscious.

## **Coming to America**

Before a tie-breaker could be staged, Stribling returned to his native United States. However, American boxing manager [Walter Friedman](#), who had attended the Stribling-Carnera bouts, took an interest in the young Italian. Though Stribling had proven himself the obviously better fighter, Friedman knew that the sport of boxing could sometimes be as much about the bizarre as it could be about the sweet science itself. Friedman convinced See that Carnera’s size alone could bring in huge crowds in the United States merely as a boxing sideshow, even if he wasn’t a legitimate contender. At some point shortly after Carnera’s arrival stateside, his career fell under the



direction of one of New York City's premiere organized crime figures, [Owney Madden](#). Using Friedman and See as his fronts, Madden had a huge portion of all profits generated by Carnera's career in the U.S. He likely orchestrated several fixes to the unknowing Primo's benefit.

Carnera's first American fight was against veteran New York fighter [Clayton Peterson](#). Though "Big Boy" Peterson was renowned for his size, Carnera outweighed him by more than sixty pounds. Peterson managed to last one minute and ten seconds against the hulking European invader, though newspaper writers noticed that the New Yorker "showed no inclination to fight." Less than a week later a fighter named [Elzear Rioux](#) fell down six times in the opening round of his fight with Primo in Chicago, stunning many in the crowd who swore they never saw Primo land a single punch. After an investigation

by the Illinois Commission, Carnera was cleared of any wrongdoing, though Rioux lost his boxing license. A string of similar knockouts followed, all either potential set-ups or against no-hope opponents who were outweighed by as much as seventy-five pounds. In a period of just four months, Carnera appeared in the ring sixteen times, winning every one of those bouts by the short route.

Meanwhile, Friedman backed the Carnera spectacle with the most outrageous promotional fanfare even given to a fighter. The focus, of course, wasn't so much on Primo's prowess in the ring as it was on his huge muscular frame. Though other fighters may have accomplished more as consummate professionals, they failed to draw the huge crowds Carnera drew as a "freak show" of the sport. Before long, big name fighters began calling out Carnera in hopes of sharing some of the big purses he brought in. The earliest among these was a burly, hard-hitting African American fighter by the name of [George Godfrey](#). A legitimate top ten contender, Godfrey was coming off of a streak of four consecutive knockout victories. On June 23, 1930, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Godfrey looked well on his way of adding Carnera to his list of victims, when the referee mysteriously disqualified him in the fifth round. A riot broke out amid the crowd of 35,000 in the arena, with accusations of fakery flying.

Following five more knockout wins, Primo battled [Jim Maloney](#) in Maloney's hometown of Boston on October 7, 1930. Really a B-level fighter at his best, Maloney still had enough skill to outbox Primo over ten rounds and win a decision, Carnera's first loss since coming to the United States. In his very next match, against [Paolino Uzcudun](#), before a crowd of 75,000 (the largest attendance to a sporting event in Spanish history), Carnera again appeared to be badly outboxed.

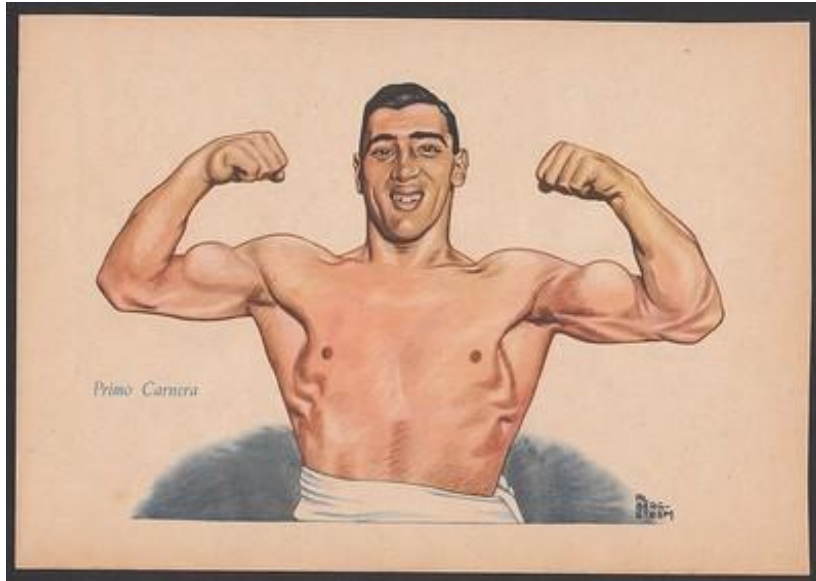
Though reporters subsequently remembered seeing Carnera win two rounds of the scheduled ten rounds, he was awarded a dubious decision. On March 5, 1931, Carnera received a second chance at Maloney. Primo suffered a cracked rib prior to this bout, but elected to go on with the even anyway. Outweighing the Boston fighter by nearly seventy-five pounds, Carnera managed a deserved decision over ten rounds.

Having clearly witnessed Primo's shortcomings as a boxer, Primo's handlers decided it best not to ruin his earning potential by putting him in with any more threatening opponents for a few months. Instead they took him on an old-fashioned barnstorming tour, matching him against hopeless pugs. Over a period of less than two months, crowds in Buffalo, Toronto, Rochester, Newark, and Wilmington watched Carnera bowl over a succession of unworthy opponents, some of whom had lost more fights than they had won. Then, supposedly at the wishes of Primo himself, they let him fight [Jack Sharkey](#), the leading contender for the heavyweight title held by [Max Schmeling](#). A fast, experienced, and tough fighter, the future hall of famer Sharkey had been in the ring with the likes of both Schmeling and Jack Dempsey. On October 12, 1931, Sharkey clearly outboxed Carnera, but Primo impressed many both by showing improvements in his boxing technique and in showing a tremendous heart in taking terrific punishment from Jack. Suffering a knockdown in the fourth round, Primo nonetheless rose to fight on and lasted the ten round distance. Primo further silenced his critics by taking a deserved ten round decision over contender King Levinsky in November.

After Levinsky, Primo left America for Europe, embarking on yet another tour. In Paris, Berlin, London, and Milan, Carnera took on mostly overmatched opponents. Then, on May 30, 1932, in an astonishing upset, he lost a ten round decision Canada's [Larry Gaines](#) in London before 70,000 people, the largest crowd for a boxing match in England's history to that point.

Still ranked among the top heavyweights in the world by [The Ring](#) magazine, Primo returned to New York, winning three straight before losing a very controversial decision to [Stanley Poreda](#) in Newark. For once Primo was on the wrong end of a bad decision, and the referee who awarded Poreda his decision was subsequently suspended from boxing by the New Jersey Commission. By the late months of 1932, Carnera was beginning to hit his stride, performing well against credible opponents and earning his status as a leading heavyweight contender. Among his victims in these months were up-and-comer [Art Lasky](#), popular Californian [Les Kennedy](#), and perennial contender [King Levinsky](#). Fighting as often as four times in seven days, he won eight bouts in the month of December alone.

In early 1933, newly crowned heavyweight champion [Jack Sharkey](#) announced that he would defend the title against the winner of a box-off between Carnera and [Ernie Schaaf](#). Though hard-hitting Californian [Max Baer](#) (fresh off of a knockout of Schmeling) was the obvious leading contender, rumors circulated that Sharkey had been paid money by men working for Owney Madden to fight Carnera. Schaaf, in whose career Sharkey had business investments, was allegedly told by Sharkey to take a dive. These accusations are somewhat proven by the film of the fight. Instead of boxing, as was his wont, Schaaf fought strangely flat-footed and uninspired. He proved an easy target for his much larger opponent, who easily took the lead in points. In the thirteenth round, Carnera knocked the beaten fighter out. Schaaf, rendered unconscious, was rushed to the hospital where it was discovered he had suffered a brain hemorrhage. When he



awoke, he was partially paralyzed and soon collapsed again, dying four days later. Doctors could not determine if Schaaf's brain damage had been incurred during the Carnera fight, or was the result of earlier illness or injury and was only aggravated by the pounding at the hands of Carnera. A crusade by anti-boxing legislators immediately began pushing for the banishment of the sport, while some Commissions proposed the establishment of a

“dreadnaught” weight class for men of Carnera’s size, to protect smaller heavyweights.

## World Champion

Tragedy or not, fix or not, Primo had beaten Ernie Schaaf and was awarded his shot at champion Sharkey. On June 29, 1933, the clumsy contender got his second shot at Sharkey before a crowd of 40,000 people at Madison Square Garden in New York. Sharkey clearly boxed his way to a decision over Primo a year earlier, before winning the title. This time, for whatever reason, Jack seemed obviously intimidated by Primo’s size. The champion boxed and moved as he did in the first fight, but Carnera seemed to be doing much better in the rematch. In the sixth round, a right uppercut from the challenger that Sharkey never saw coming ended the fight. Stripped of his senses, Sharkey seemed to lift off of his feet before tumbling to the mat. The Carnera victory to become heavyweight champion was a tremendous upset, one of the biggest in boxing of the decade. Many speculated that Sharkey had been paid to take a dive. Though Jack denied this to his dying day, his own wife admitted her suspicions.

Because Primo is regarded by most historians as a flash-in-the-pan fluke in the heavyweight championship, the fact that Carnera made two successful defenses of his title often goes overlooked. On October 22, 1933, in a victorious return to his native Italy, Carnera fought a rematch with ranked contender [Paolino Uzcudun](#) of Spain, winning by fifteen round decision before dictator Benito Mussolini himself. He then traveled to Miami, Florida to take on former light heavyweight champion and future hall of famer [Tommy Loughran](#) on March 1, 1934. This match produced the greatest weight disparity in world title fight history. The Italian goliath outweighed his challenger by eighty-four pounds. In his final title bout appearance, the aging Loughran gave a good showing and won several rounds with his smooth boxing style, but was nevertheless outgunned, outmuscled, and outsized by the champion. Carnera repeatedly stepped on his challenger’s feet, breaking a toe. Injured and against a much bigger, younger foe, Loughran ultimately fell victim to Primo’s reach and stamina. Carnera took the fifteen round decision.



## The Baer Fight

Somewhere around this point, the champion appeared in a movie titled [The Prizefighter and the Lady](#). The popular film starred Carnera alongside several other big name boxing figures, including Jack Dempsey, [James J. Jeffries](#), [Jess Willard](#), and the current number one contender, Max Baer of California. The hard-hitting and charismatic Baer's recent knockout of [Max Schmeling](#) turned a lot of heads and made a match between he and the champion a highly anticipated showdown. On June 14, 1934, at [Madison Square Garden](#), the pair finally did battle in a most unusual and chaotic affair. The champion went down in the opening round under a barrage of punches from the wild-swinging challenger. Sensing a first round knockout imminent, Baer pressed forward for the first time, putting together a ruthless series of

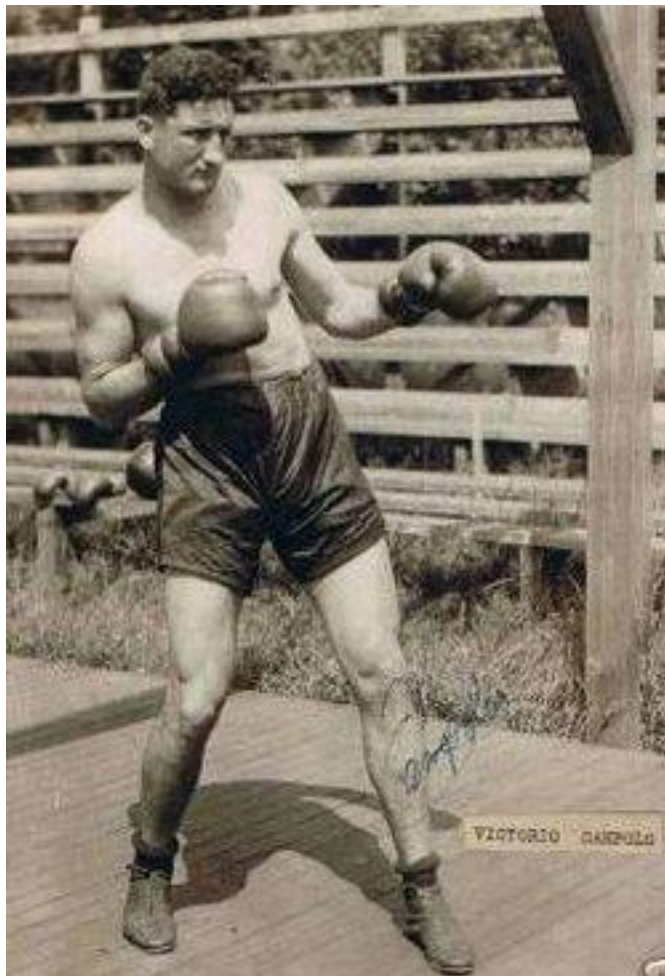
punches that sent Primo down twice more. Carnera showed tremendous heart in surviving the round, but was clearly unaware of his surroundings when the bell rang and he wandered into the wrong corner. Exhausted by his futile efforts to put the giant away, Baer tried desperately to finish the still groggy champion off in the second, but to no avail. The pair ended up clinching and wrestling for the next several rounds, with both men frequently tripping and falling to the canvas. During one of these tumbles, Baer got laughs from the crowd by looking over at Carnera and joking, "Last one up's a sissy!" Eventually Carnera, having steadied himself, began to use his size and reach against the challenger.

The Italian was never known as a quality boxer, but, against the crude and exhausted challenger, he had had enough skills to gain a lead on the score cards as the fight entered the tenth round. Toward the end of that round a roundhouse right from Baer turned the tide once again, sending Primo fumbling across the ring. A follow-up fusillade of blows sent the champion down. The brave but battered Carnera made it to his feet just in time to hear the bell clang to signal the conclusion of the round. The minute rest did little to revive Carnera's senses. He came out for the eleventh, but proved to be little more than a gigantic target, going down twice more before the referee stopped the contest. Including the wrestling falls in the middle of the fight, Primo hit the deck eleven times in eleven rounds. Primo had lost the championship.

## Joe Louis & Later Years

Taking five months off to regroup following the embarrassing fiasco with Baer, Carnera returned to the ring for a tour of South America in late 1934. He fought three opponents of mediocre to poor quality, winning all four bouts. Only [Victorio Campolo](#) of Argentina lasted the twelve-round distance. Then he returned to America to knock out an unheralded giant by the name of [Ray Impelletiere](#) with a devastating left hook in the ninth round.

On June 25, 1935, Primo took on his first top ranked opponent since Baer when he faced up-and-coming [Joe Louis](#) from Detroit. At this point the undefeated but inexperienced Louis was regarded as an untested prospect and thus many became interested in the results of a match between the ex-champion and the raw novice. But, because of the political turmoil created from Italy's recent invasion of Ethiopia, the fight took on a meaning that spread beyond the realm of sports. Ethnic tensions within New York City grew so dangerous in fact that many powerful people in the city pushed for the fight's cancellation. Despite - or possibly because of - the controversy, 62,000 paying customers showed up at Yankee Stadium to watch Louis annihilate his gargantuan foe. After the first round, Carnera's face dripped with blood, some of his lower teeth having been pierced through his upper lip. The remaining rounds only prolonged the inevitable, as Carnera proved easy target practice. A right hand in the sixth round sent the ex-champion "down slowly, like a great chimney that had been dynamited," wrote journalist John



Kiernan. Exhibiting the same heart as he had against Baer, Primo rose dazedly to his feet, only to collapse once again under another Louis attack. He bravely stood up yet again, just in time to be battered to the floor a third time. Carnera had the honor of being on his feet yet again before referee Arthur Donovan stopped the fight.

The decimation at the hands of Joe Louis was Primo's final performance as a major contender in the heavyweight ranks. He managed a few more wins against moderate level opponents on American soil before suffering two consecutive losses to the much smaller Leroy Haynes in 1936 and returning to Europe. The change of locale did nothing to change Carnera's faltering career. After suffering a second round knockout at the hands of [Joseph Zupan](#) in Zupan's pro debut, he finally retired. Returning to his native Italy to live in peace, Carnera's financial problems prompted his return to the ring after the end of World War II. Though he won his first two comeback bouts, three subsequent

losses prompted the permanent completion of his boxing career. Still in need of cash, he resorted to a semi-successful professional wrestling career in America and later starred as the villain in several low budget movies. When there was no more money to be made, he once again returned to Italy, where he died of psoriasis brought on by alcoholism on June 29, 1967, at the age of sixty.

**Newark Advocate and American Tribune**  
**14 June 1934**  
**CHAMPION IS SLIGHT FAVORITE OVER BAER**  
**IN FIGHT FOR TITLE**  
**BY Alan Gould**

New York, June 14. Convinced anything can happen when Primo Camera and Max Baer start swinging at each other tonight, the fight clans staged an old-fashioned rally today in anticipation of one of the most fantastic fights ever waged for the heavyweight championship of the world.

The turmoil of the big town was a far cry from those glamorous days of 1921 when Tex Rickard convinced the faithful, through the gentle art of the ballyhoo, that Georges Carpentier -had a chance to beat Jack Dempsey and attracted 90,000 customers to see the slaughter.

For one thing, times have, changed radically with the fistic business. For another, the "international angle" has been overworked, but perhaps 50,000 will cross another river tonight to see whether the California song and dance man can topple the 260 pound Italian Goliath within the limit of 15 rounds in Madison Square Garden's sunken Long Island arena,

Promoters, more optimistic than confident, predicted 60,000 cash customers would contribute to a gate of nearly \$100,000. Good weather was forecast and a late rush anticipated. The latest shift in betting odds today found Camera no better than 6-to-5 choice to retain the title he won last year on a knockout from Jack Sharkey and which he has twice defended.

For various reasons, or for no reason at all, sentiment has swung sharply in the past few days to Baer. Some of the direct causes have, been the suspicion that Camera, bothered by a sore throat, has passed the pink of condition and likewise developed an appearance of nervousness that will do him no good if he happens to bump his chin into a couple of Baer's earnest right-hand wallops.

Indirectly, a reaction in Baer's favor followed the sensational charges of Boxing Commissioner Bill Brown that Max himself was in no shape to go the route and that the bout should have been postponed, out of fairness to the cash customers.

Pending the story that the official scales tell today, it appeared Baer had whipped himself into as good fighting condition as he ever will be, despite Brown's critical diagnosis, whereas Camera was the victim of a carefully mapped "goat getting" campaign.

Even Baer's most enthusiastic supporters from California conceded that the longer the bout goes





the better will be Camera's chances of winning on points from the curly-haired puncher.

The Californian concedes advantages to Camera in everything but reach, confidence and punching power. As it happens, these three, factors have been important enough to turn the scales many times before, with the accent on the punch.

The fight will be broadcast by a National (NBC) radio hookup. The preliminary fights go on at 7 p. m. (E. S. T.) and the main bout scheduled for 9 p.m.

**Nevada State Journal 2 March 1934**

**Carnera Decisions Loughran Keeps Title**

**Giant Unable To Knockout His Opponent**

**Philadelphian Has Little of Old Ability**

**By STUART CAMERON**

**MIAMI, Fla., March 1.**

Primo Camera, Italy's man mountain, successfully defended his world's heavyweight championship here tonight by outpointing Tommy Loughran of Philadelphia in 15 slow and tedious rounds.

It was one of the hollowest victories ever scored by a heavyweight champion. Despite an 85-pound difference in the weights and a tremendous advantage in height and youth, the clumsy, lumbering Italian was unable even to score a single knockdown.

**Camera Opens Up in 15th**

Not until the closing rounds, when his great weight had worn the challenger down, did Camera show to advantage. In fact, it was not until the 13th round, when Loughran was so spent he barely could lift his arms, that Carnera waded in and showed fire and fight that is associated with holders of pugilism's highest title. Loughran carried nothing more into the ring with him than a great fighting heart, the remnant of his once great left hand, and the cunning accumulated in more than a decade of campaigning.

**Crowd Is Small**

For more than half the battle his meager equipment was sufficient to hold Camera at bay. When they went into the seventh round Loughran held a two-to-one advantage having won four successive rounds after dropping the opening two.



The fight set an all-time low for attendance and gate receipts. Fewer Than 23,00 were in the big Madison Square Garden arena for the fight, and' the receipts could not have exceeded \$55.000.

The bout was made all the more depressing by an occasional downpour of rain.

### **Speed, Stamina Lacking**

. The decision was unanimous, Referee, Leo Shea and Judges Red McLaughlin and Art Latham, turning in score-cards in Carnera's favor. The United Press tally agreed with that of the officials, giving Loughran four rounds and Carnera eleven.

Loughran's bid for victory and the championship he has been gunning for 15 years ended when he won the sixth round -by slamming home a hard right at the bell. Beginning with the seventh he did not win another round. He fought brilliantly in spots, but the old speed and stamina was gone.

### **Carnera Thrice Warned**

Carnera was quick to sense his rival's letdown, and beginning with the eighth round he increased his pace and moved to the attack. It was not a vicious attack. Not once during the bout did the 'big Italian charge in recklessly, pin Loughran in a corner, and defy him to get out.

His charge was more that of a slightly annoyed bear than anything else. He would shuffle in, cuff Loughran about the face and body, and then step back to inspect his damage. Often he would embrace Loughran in his great grasp, shake him roughly, and attempt to fling him to the floor. Three times the referee was forced to warn him for this illegal move, and in the first .and ninth rounds cautioned Prime against stamping on his opponent's feet.

### **Camera Fails to K. O.**

At each of these warnings the crowd, which was with the slight challenger to a man, gave Carnera a rousing round of boos. If Carnera had had a bit more of the killer spirit, and a bit more

authority in his punches, he could not have failed to knock Loughran down, and possibly out, in the 14th or 15th round.

A glancing right knocked the spent challenger groggy shortly after the bell sent them into action for the 14th. Carnera then proceeded to lay down a 'barrage of rights and lefts that kept Loughran bouncing on and off the ropes. He was so dazed at the bell that he insisted on-going to Carnera's corner, and it was necessary for Bill Duffy, Primo's -chief second, to escort him, to his own seat.

### **Forced to Clinch**

Only his unflinching spirit kept Loughran erect in the 15th. Several times it seemed that his quivering knees must buckle beneath him, but on each occasion he summoned strength from some where and kept erect.

Near the close Tommy's weariness overcame even his stout heart and he was forced to stagger into clinch after clinch, where he could grab Carnera for support, to 'Keep from going down.

The first two rounds saw Carnera furnish a surprise by repeatedly beating Loughran to the punch with left jabs. In these heats Loughran had difficulty in finding the range, and he appeared baffled by Carnera's tremendous size. Beginning with the third, however, he began to find the range. Circling backward he flicked left after left into Camera's face as the giant, in chasing his man. left openings.

### **Loughran Jars Camera**

In the fourth round Loughran suddenly switched his attack to the body, and before Carnera could get his guard adjusted, scored half a dozen or so clean, if tame; shots to the body.

Carnera had the better of the first minute of fighting in the fifth but the Philadelphian came to life to take the play away from his ponderous foe to win his third straight round and gain, a heartening cheer from his friends,.

Loughran surprised everybody, including himself, by jarring Carnera at the beginning of the sixth with a sweeping left hook to the .chin. Pressing his advantage Loughran danced in and peppered the Italian with shots from both wings, forcing Camera to clinch repeatedly.

## **Little Blood Is Shed**

Near the close of the round Carnera bounced one of his tremendous fists off Tommy's head, opening a small gash that sent a thin trickle of blood down the former light heavyweight champion's cheeks. It was the only blood shed during the entire 15 rounds.

It was in the seventh round that Carnera, for the first time since round two, caught up with his elusive foe. He started Loughran into retreat with a heavy right to the face, and followed by a heavy cannonading against the ropes. It was at close quarters that Loughran was most helpless against the giant Carnera. Loughran appeared more like a boy than a man and his efforts to beat down Carnera's guards were entirely futile.

## **Carnera Speeds Up**

They continued their game of tag in the eighth round with the Champion twice catching his man, pinning him against the ropes and giving him the works fore and aft. They ere tremendous blows that Carnera dealt but their cumulative effect began to take their toll. Loughran's footwork became loggier , his left lost it's snap and body blows brought a grimace to his face.

Carnera continued his pounding and clinching in the ninth but Loughran landed another hard left hook to the jaw early in the session making the big fellow grunt. Angered Carnera tore after him, drove him to the ropes and cuffed him about the head. In the 10th Carnera was warned again for stepping on Tommy's foot. He staggered Tommy with a stiff right to the face.

## **Crowd Likes Tommy**

Carnera was booed for his tactics particularly in th e 12th when he drove his right elbow into the Philadelphian's body. Tommy was beginning to be handicapped somewhat by the wet canvas. Rain was falling in a fine drizzle.

Although beaten badly Loughran was popular with the crowd. He made a game fight against tremendous physical handicaps. Carnera outweighed him 270pounds to 184 and was younger. Tommy is 34 while Carnera is only 27. Early in the night it seemed that the bout might be postponed for a third time. A drenching downpour started at 9:30pm, half an hour before the main bout was scheduled to start. It let up and cleared temporarily and the program was run off.

## **Little Betting**

Many had brought umbrellas, particularly those in the \$20 ringside sections – those who wore evening clothes. Carnera had entered the ring the 3 to 1 favorite but there was little betting. Most

experts figured Carnera's chances were 10 to 1 and they were surprised when Tommy lasted the limit.

Carnera will receive 40 per cent of the net, Loughran 10 per cent. Apparently Tommy's raining expenses will be barely covered. Neither was marked up in the fighting. Carnera grinned happily in his dressing room when a study of the mirror revealed his face unscathed. He said one of his eyes was sore and rubbed ice on it.

He explained his failure to knock out Tommy "I did my best but he always got away from me just when I was ready to floor him."

## **The Coshocton Tribune**

### **24 June 1930**

#### **Battle of Giants Just Another Foul; Carnera Wins in Fifth Round**

#### **Big Negro, George Godfrey, Hits Huge Italian Low Blow, Ending Furious. Fight**

#### **CARNERA LOOKS TOUGH**

#### **Godfrey Makes Furious Bid for Victory Against Menace to All Heavyweights**

**By DAVIS J. WALSH,**

PHILADELPHIA. June 24. —Another fight, another foul; another crowd, another howl. Philadelphia awoke this morning with a dark brown conviction in its soul that last night had been one of those evenings that leave one vaguely aware that he had been born a sap and afterward went into a slump. To marshal the facts of the case briefly, succinctly and as painlessly as possible, Primo Carnera, the "beeg bologna." got the decision on a foul in the fifth round; George Godfrey got the official onus of having "deliberately struck a low punch," and Philadelphia got a \$200,000 hangover—the usual morning-after reaction of those who indulge in low grade entertainment.

Six months ago, Phil Scott took a "plea" with Von Porat and was sustained, three months later, he filed another demurrer with Jack Sharkey and the petition was denied, two weeks ago, the heavyweight championship was bequeathed to Schmeling as he lay groveling upon the floor under the impact of Sharkey's foul, last night-

It was a balmy summer's evening and a goodly crowd was there. They came, some 35,000 of them, to see the great prize fight, the so called battle of the behemoths. They left, muttering



darkly in a strange tongue, foreign even to the old fifth ward down along the river front. They had seen the man who had been winning — at least in the writer's opinion— foul the man who had been losing, thus re-enacting the Schmeling-Sharkey situation and bringing a second battle of bewilderment before the public.

Heigho! another fight, another foul, another crowd, another howl. They still were howling when Carnera, having been stretched out in a neutral corner from a very low left to the body, arose from his chair of apparent agony after the customary interval and made his way unaided to the dressing rooms. They were still were howling on the downtown street corners at an early hour this morning about the thousands of dollars they had spent to witness this

unsatisfactory but seemingly conventional climax. The referee, Tommy Reilly, was orating to the effect that he meant to report the illegal punch as being deliberate and Chairman Wiener, of the boxing commission, was exhorting all auditors with the tidings that the board would decide this morning whether all or any part of Godfrey's purse was to be taken away from him.

They can take lots of things away from Godfrey's purse and maybe something from Godfrey's prestige, but they will take nothing away from the impression that Carnera left with the crowd by his performance last night. It was a bruising, bone crushing fight and the mastodon proved himself to be a real heavyweight and a definite menace to any and all who may stand between him and the championship. He wasn't winning this fight when it ended but he had lived down a savage beating in the first two rounds and was beginning to come on, a performance that savored of potential greatness.

I never saw Godfrey fight as fiercely as he did in the first two heats. They said no man could stand up before him if he really wanted to let himself go He let himself out as, never before last night and Carnera still was doggedly carrying on while the negro was beginning to puff and blow

and wheeze. Old Gawge, weighing 250 pounds yesterday afternoon, has known better condition. Carnera down to 262, his lowest weight in America, was never as good before. This applies both to condition and fighting ability.

He needed the former to survive Godfrey's body attack; it required the latter to carry him along with the negro's early pace and bring him out in the clear for the third and fourth rounds.

Carnera, clipped full upon the jowl with Godfrey's best punches and whanged deep into the bosom with Godfrey's body attack, must have been a tough man or he wouldn't have lasted long enough to be fouled. His in-fighting, usually old Gawge's racket, was no good in the third round and old Gawge went back from there to bung perplexedly at this white mammoth who had been represented to him as a chump. He showed a good left hand, he had plenty of savvy in many respects for a fighter who was supposed to be anybody's sap. I don't think any heavyweight can really hurt him. Anyhow, if he wasn't hurt in the first two rounds last night, he will never be hurt again.

Godfrey went out with the first bell, winging with both hands to the body, and had Carnera on the run, forthwith. The latter landed only one right hand and a few straight lefts early in the rounds. The rest of the way he was doing a Ray Schalk. He was catching a great ball game—on the chin, on the bosom and, truth to tell, on the run Gawge was hitting a few of them right down the foul line, prompting Carnera to take on occasional appeal, which, in my opinion, proved to be without justification. Anyhow, the colored boy was riding well out in front for the first minute and a half of the ensuing round, his body -punching and occasional left hook, up above, giving him enough leeway so that Camera's rally in the closing minute just missed getting him a stand off. The third was about even, Godfrey starting with a blazing left hook but taking a series of right crosses to the jaw.

He came rushing back with punches down below but Carnera straightened him out with two rights to the face and was timed beautifully by Godfrey's right uppercut at the bell. The fourth was uneventful but what there was of it, belonged to Godfrey This wasn't the official verdict, by the way. According to the tabs turned in. the fight was absolutely even when it ended

Just before it did end. Chairman Wiener, according to his subsequent statement, visited Godfrey before the fifth round to warn him against low punches. If he did the effect was negligible, if not altogether unsatisfactory Godfrey's first real punch in the fifth round was a rather low left, his second a very low one. Camera, having apparently debated the matter at length, finally decided he had been fouled and went into a whirling fall and lay prone. Dr. J. Webb Vaughn, the official physician, examined the hulk on the floor and declared him to be in no fit condition to continue. He said he had given the man the "flashlight test," whatever that is. and that he wasn't faking, to use ' the doctor s own words.' And that was all and it was quite enough. Heigho! another fight, another foul; another crowd, another howl



## **Primo Carnera: Heavyweight Champion or Mob Creature? Rich Thomas, Yahoo! Contributor Network - Nov 30, 2009**

Primo Carnera was born in Sequals, a small Italian town north of Venice, on October 26, 1906. He grew up training to be a carpenter, moving to France at the age of 14. Even in his teens, however, Carnera was already developing the substantial physique that would go on to earn him international fame, so by the age of 16 he had joined the circus as a strongman. It was there he was noticed by French boxing promoters, and by 18 he had switched professions and become a professional pugilist.

Carnera's strong point as a boxer was also his biggest selling point: his size. In an era when a good heavyweight was about 6 foot and 200 lbs., Carnera was almost 6' 6" tall and weighed around 265 lbs. He was a big, well-muscled man, and had a sideshow appeal akin to today's Nikolai Vaulev. Like Vaulev, he was very strong, but was ponderous and his main advantages in the ring were long reach, height, and heavy, thudding shots.

Drawing crowds on the basis of his big, buff body, Carnera racked up a 14-1 record before meeting his first serious heavyweight contender in 1929, Young Stirbling. Stirbling took the bigger, but poorly schooled Italian to school, scoring with hard body shots and making Carnera look foolish. Then Stirbling hit Carnera below the belt, resulting in a Disqualification when Carnera could not continue. This was the first fight that some dubbed as "fixed," but was it? Probably not. Stirbling was relying heavily on body shots, after all, so that he crunched Carnera's family jewels is easy to believe. Even if Carnera were faking, which is a big if, it does not take a dirty referee to issue a DQ under those circumstances. A foul is a foul is a foul.

The two met again in Paris roughly three weeks later. Stirbling was once again outclassing the inexperienced and unskilled Italian. As Stirbling turned to return to his corner after the 7th, Carnera hit him on the back of the head. This time it was Carnera who was disqualified for flagrant fouling. Strangely, some historians say this fight was fixed too, even though it was Carnera who lost it by DQ.

However, the Stirbling bouts had attracted the attention of American boxing promoters, and soon Carnera was on his way to the States. It was here that his management came under the influence of Owney Madden, a British-born gangster who was involved in bootlegging, boxing promotions, as well as running the famed Cotton Club.

### ***Only in America***

Carnera's boxing career in America was almost immediately dogged by allegations of corruption. His second bout in the U.S. was in Chicago in January 1930 against Elzear Rioux. Rioux was knocked down six times in the 1st Round, with many in the audience swearing they never saw Carnera land a single clean punch. Worse is that Chicago was one of the most mobbed-up cities in the country at the time. The Illinois Boxing Commission let Carnera go, but fined Rioux and revoked his boxing license. It is clear that Rioux was a tomato can who did a very poor job of taking a dive.

The big Italian met his next contender in June 1930 the form of George Godfrey, an African-American who was almost as big as Carnera and on a knockout streak. Godfrey was winning the fight when he was disqualified on a foul. In this case, the eye-witness reports are damning: the referee saved Carnera. Finally, in October 1930 Carnera was outboxed by a journeyman named Jim Maloney, and either because the Boston venue was beyond the reach of Owney Madden or because Madden had gotten lazy, Carnera lost the decision.

In November, Carnera returned to Europe for a match in Barcelona with Basque fighter Paulino Uzcudun. Ringside observers say Carnera won only 2 Rounds, but he won the decision anyway. Then came a 1931 rematch with Maloney, which Carnera actually won fair and square. Perhaps chastened by the earlier loss, Carnera was clearly starting to learn something about boxing.

### ***In Contention***

By October 1931, Carnera was fighting Jack Sharkey, a future heavyweight champion and a man who had beaten Carnera's old rival Stirbling. Although he was smaller, Sharkey was a tough character who had gone 7 Rounds with Jack Dempsey. Sharkey knocked him down in the 4th and cleanly outpointed him, but Carnera was in the fight right up to the very end. He impressed many with his fortitude and improved ability. Carnera followed up on that momentum by meeting and defeating contender Kingfish Levinsky a month later.

Carnera continued to fight and mostly win, drawing record-breaking crowds on the strength of his freakish size. In 1932 he knocked out the South African Heavyweight Champion, but then dropped two points losses before bouncing back to beat an undefeated Art Lansky (a fighter who would appear as a Braddock opponent in *The Cinderella Man*). Then he won a rematch with Kingfish Levinsky.

Carnera's momentum was briefly interrupted by the unfortunate death of Earnie Schaaf, who had recently been savagely knocked out by contender Max Baer and should not have had medical clearance to continue fighting. Carnera's blows compounded the damage from the Baer beating, and caused an inter-cranial hemorrhage that resulted in Schaaf's death four days after the fight.

### ***Championship***

Jack Sharkey had previously announced that he would give a title shot to the winner of the Carnera vs. Schaaf bout. It has been rumored that this was arranged by Owney Madden, but it is just as likely that Sharkey was avoiding a fight with the incredibly dangerous puncher Max Baer. It is also rumored that Sharkey took a dive on orders from Madden, but keep in mind that Sharkey was 31 and had a lot of boxing miles on his body. In their June 1933 rematch, Sharkey made a lethargic, flat-footed effort that made him an easy target for the lumbering Italian, and Carnera gave him a bad beating, hitting with a right uppercut in the 6th that literally lifted Sharkey from the canvas. Sharkey denied taking a dive to his dying day, and certainly no sane man would deliberately catch an uppercut like the one that felled him.



*Primo Carnera*

Now the World Heavyweight Champion, Carnera made the first defense of his title in Rome, in a rematch with Basque fighter Paulino Uzcudun. Fascist strongman Benito Mussolini was among those in attendance. That Carnera won on points is not disputed. His second defense was in Florida, against light heavyweight great Tommy Loughran. Loughran outboxed the plodding Carnera for several rounds, but Carnera fought a smart, yet rough and dirty fight that made the most of his size. He repeatedly stepped on Loughran's feet, pinning him down. Eventually Loughran broke a toe, further limiting his mobility. Carnera probably should have had points deducted, but as it was he won a

gritty decision.

In June 1934, Carnera defended his title for the third time against the feared funnyman of boxing, Max Baer. Baer's wild, aggressive assault felled Carnera eleven times en route to an 11th Round knockout. Carnera displayed great courage and stamina, getting up again and again just to be nailed by the hardest hitter in the game at that time. Even so, the big Italian was utterly demolished by the Clown Prince of Boxing.

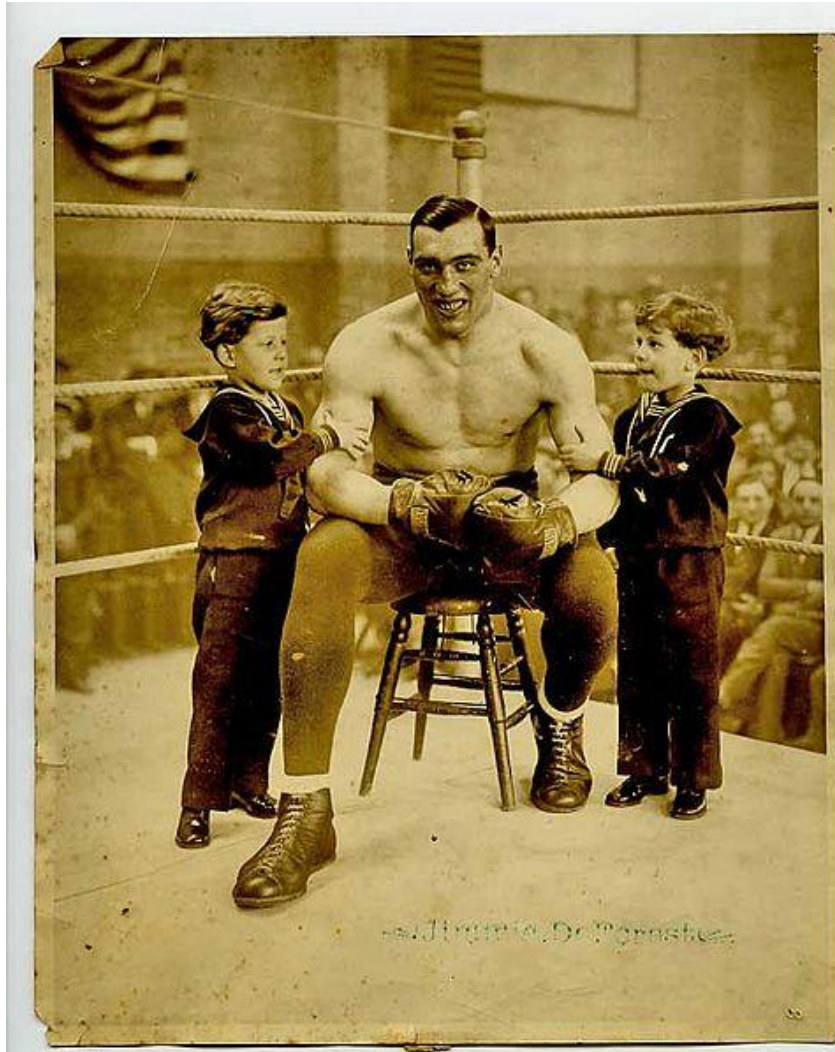
### ***Former Champion***

Carnera started a comeback with a tour of South America, but in June 1936 met a rising, 19-0 Joe Louis. The backdrop for this fight was the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, so 62,000 people filled Yankee Stadium to watch another of what would be many racially-charged heavyweight bouts in the mid-1930s. Louis was even more dangerous than Baer, and reduced Carnera to utter helplessness in 6 Rounds. The fight ended with a crushing knockout.

Carnera boxed occasionally after that, but was never again a serious world contender. In 1946 he turned to wrestling, where he once again became a star. He died in 1967 in his native Italy.

### ***Legacy***

Unfortunately, Carnera's name is bound up with shadowy mob dealings and allegations of corruption. Certainly there were Carnera bouts where officials were tampered with, and more



where the opponent was either chosen because they were cream-puffs or were paid to take a dive. But how just how many allegations of fight fixing were true?

In many ways, Carnera is the antecedent to today's Nikolai Valuev. Yes, Valuev undoubtedly robbed an aging Evander Holyfield in a bout in Switzerland in 2008. The political machinations that awarded him with the WBA title for a second time - a title he did not even win in the ring! - were pure farce. However, it is beyond doubt that Valuev beat guys like John Ruiz and Sergei Lyakhovich fair and square (if barely beat them).

In many ways, it seems likely that Carnera's career is more tarnished than it deserves. After all, the aforementioned Holyfield robbed Lennox

Lewis in their first bout (with the help of Don King), and no one thinks of him as a product of dirty judging. Carnera was an Italian boxer in the 1930s, the decade of the gangster. Viewed through that lens, conspiracy theories regarding the mafia come easy. Yet upon examining the facts, it becomes clear that Primo Carnera won plenty of real fights, and he did it the same way Valuev did: on the basis of sheer size, reach and strength.

# Funny Sketches by Primo Carnera

*How the Biggest Heavyweight Goes in For Comic Art With as Much Gusto as He Shows in His Ring Punches.*

**A**LMOST all men in the public eye have hobbies or secretly fostered ambitions. And that goes for prizefighters as well as statesmen. Gene Tunney had a hankering after Shakespeare and other high-brow literature, even while delivering wicked lefts to the jaw. Jack Dempsey guarded his

*Carnera Caricatures Himself as an Elephant Hunter Who Finds His Fist More Potent Than the Elephant Bone Gun.*



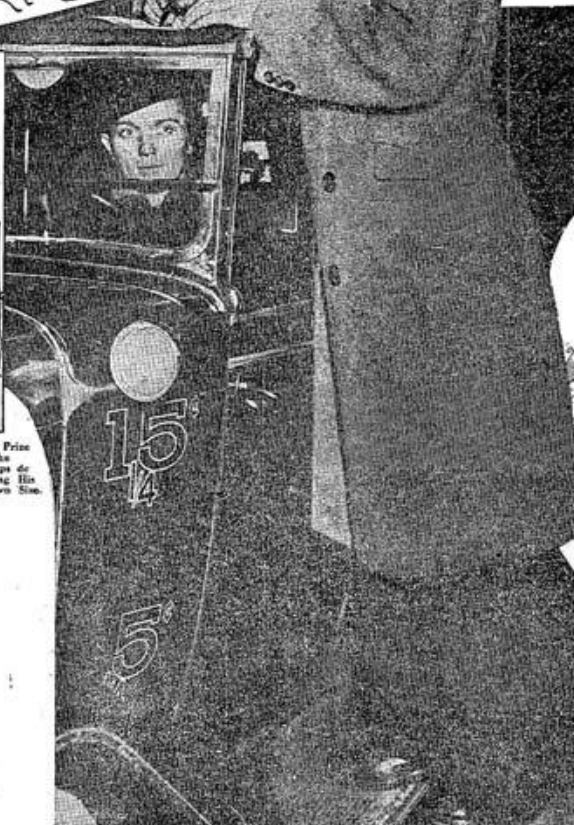
*"Lost in New York." But Imagine Anything Like That Happening to Primo Carnera, Who Is a Human Skyscraper as Well as a Champion Heavyweight Aspirant and Cartoonist.*



*In This Pungent Caricature, the Prize Fighter Pictures Himself as the Premier Dancer in a Corps de Ballet at the Opera, Revealing His Amusement at His Own Size.*



*The Hands of the Italian Giant May Not Look Artistic, but They Pack a Hard Punch in the Ring—and Guide a Gifted Pen When Out of It.*



*"Love Flies Out the Window in Song" in Which Carnera Caricatures His Hoarse Voice. According to Broadway Legend, It Can Drown Out the Sound of Traffic.*

ALMOST all men in the public eye have hobbies or secretly fostered ambitions. And that goes for prizefighters as well as statesmen. Gene Tunney had a hankering after Shakespeare and other high-brow literature, even while delivering wicked lefts to the jaw. Jack Dempsey guarded his reconstructed nose in the ring, so that, it wouldn't be flattened before another stage appearance. And Primo Carnera, the Italian giant, who is touring America and knocking out a series of job lot heavyweights, goes in for cartooning. Indeed, his ambition to be a comic artist is second only to that of becoming the heavyweight champion of the world. And if he fails to attain the latter goal it is a safe guess that he will begin sparring with pen and ink and paper as a regular job.

Already he is proving a knockout in the latter field, as some of the specimens of his work on this page will show. For the information of the skeptics, Primo hasn't any "ghosts" hovering about him. Some prizefighters may have ghost-writers, but Primo wants it known that he has no ghost-artists. He doesn't go in for shadow drawing.

It is true that his pal and traveling companion, L. G. Berings, is a famous French illustrator. But their strikingly different drawing styles belie the suspicion that Berings is anything more than a flesh-and-blood artist in his own right. All that Monsieur Berings does is what any art editor is supposed to do — that is, suggest changes and improvements in Primo's sketches.

"Primo makes no pretense of being an artist, except in the ring," explains Berings. "But I do think he has an original comic line which I would only spoil if I were to try to do what is not my forte—draw comics. Carnera easily is the funniest of all the amateur draughtsman I've ever met."

And so the "Ambling Alp," between bouts, and almost daily gymnasium workouts, spends hours amusing himself by making as odd a variety of sketches as one can imagine. This is the more remarkable when you think of the man himself. He is frank to admit that he is anything but artistic in appearance — rather, he says, he is a caricature.

He is six feet, six inches in height, and weighs 275- pounds. Never in modern times has so formidable a looking husky loomed among the leather pushers. He towers "like a veritable giant summoned from memories of childhood fairy tales. His bulging muscles, battle scowl and shaggy black hair visualize a folk lore ogre. When ready for ring action and devoid of smiles, Carnera seems a combination of caveman and hairy ape.

He personifies individual physical might, so far as looks are concerned. So awesome is the effect of Camera's appearance that even the ordinarily imperturbable Gene Tunney, retired ring champion, is reported to have remarked on seeing Primo: "Good gracious, what tremendous feet!" This remark helped set the fashion for making fun of Primo's ponderous pedal extremities.

He does wear a 17 ½ shoe. His hands are also huge. But his hands aren't too clumsy to prevent him from drawing. A few weeks ago Carnera made his first stab at his idea of an American comic strip. Unlike the professionals, who employ carefully lined beaver board to make uniform the size of their drawings. Primo first used ordinary pad paper for each of the four sections, or panels, of his proposed comic strip. Of course, his method threw his sketches out of regular strip proportions. But his cartoons were suitable for double-panel, engraving and "not bad at all," in the " opinion of several comic art experts.

The drawings on this page may lack the finished technique of an experienced cartoonist, but they do reveal much that is truly comic and they are extraordinary indeed when one realizes that they were actually conceived and executed by a professional pugilist.

Camera picks himself as his chief comic art character. He usually pictures the amusing embarrassments of being so huge a man. He lets a boisterous imagination run riot in his first

series, which when translated from his Italian title means "Camera's Nightmares" each a four-picture cartoon of a dream in which the fighter appears variously as an elephant hunter, ballet dancer, football player, sprinter, etc. He is usually the goat in these dizzy dreams.. The sports writers have gleaned no more fun from his size than does Primo himself in his comic sketches. In fact Camera's cartoons display the rollicking good nature he has shown since coming into the spotlight.

This may especially interest fight critics who hold that Primo is too genial ever to become great as a ring battler. He laughs too much, they say, and that type is not ferocious enough — has not the so called "killer" instinct. But in spite of what the sock psychologists may say Carnera does go berserk when stung in a fight. He tore into Young Stribling like a madman when aroused in their London and Paris bouts last Winter. As a result, the English critics denounced him for his ferocity. And note what happened to Ace Clark, the heavyweight, during a Philadelphia bout recently. Clark gave Primo the biggest black eye of his career. In the next round, Carnera, fearing a technical knockout because of his injured eye, pounded Ace to the floor with, a terrific attack. There was nothing of the "comic artist" about him then!

Usually, however, Carnera is as sunny a soul as ever tried to swing, shoot or block a fistic wallop. One of those "just a great big boy" types. Yes, indeed — except when he is in the ring.

In his cartoon work Carnera takes great pains sketching slowly. As is the practice with, most cartoonists, he first works in pencil and then goes over the lines with India ink. He tears up many of his cartoons before he is satisfied with the final result.

Since he had comparatively little schooling, the giant heavyweight's drawing talent did not become evident until a little more than a year ago, shortly after his boxing career started in France. They say he used to laugh at his own photographs and, for the fun of it, would make crude pencil comics of them.

His manager, Leon See, a member of the French Legion of Honor; war hero and sportsman, was surprised at his "Big Boy's" skill. He encouraged Primo in his amusing art efforts and retained Berings, noted caricaturist, to be his traveling companion.

Since arriving in the United States Carnera has traveled from city to city, scoring knockouts usually in a brief time. "All pushovers," many declare, but Primo has packed the fans in wherever he appeared, and his purses have swelled to the tune of more than \$125,000 through these exhibitions. "When I consider him ready Primo will box the world's best, and it won't be long now," Manager See announces.

Meanwhile, boxing's barnstorming, benevolent, belligerent behemoth totes his drawing materials from town to town gleefully confiding to friends, and this is free, translating, "If Gene Tunney could train for the championship partly on highbrow literature, I'll do the same on lowbrow art." It was suggested recently that Carnera had neglected the funniest possible of pictorial inspirations — his opponents. Grasping the translation of that remark, Primo grinned and said, "Most of them don't stand up long enough for me to even sketch them in my mind. And then Primo added: "That's why I picture myself so much. I must look funny to many, as I do to

myself. But some day." — and this was said quite seriously — "I may not seem so comic to Sharkey or Schmeling when either one of them tries to look up at me from the floor!"

Camera's pet Russian wolfhound, called "Primo II" figures in most of his sketches, as will be seen in the cartoons on this page. "He can talk with the eyes" the dog's master declares. So Primo goes on drawing, and keeps on punching, and even if he fails in his quest for the boxing championship, he hopes some day to knock the world of cartoonists for the count.

