

**Name:** Jack 'Kid' Berg  
**Career Record:** [click](#)  
**Alias:** The Whitechapel Whirlwind  
**Birth Name:** Judah Bergman  
**Nationality:** British  
**Birthplace:** London  
**Hometown:** Whitechapel, London  
**Born:** 1909-06-28  
**Died:** 1991-04-22  
**Age at Death:** 81  
**Stance:** Orthodox  
**Height:** 5' 9"  
**Trainer:** [Ray Arcel](#)  
**Managers:** [Harry Levine](#) [Sol Gold](#)

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**Jackie 'Kid' Berg 'The Whitechapel Windmill'**

**Light-Welterweight Champion of the World (1930-31)**

Yidl (Berg) wore tzitzis. He would come into the ring, remove his robe, hang them on the ring post and leave

them there. The Jews in the crowd went crazy. It was a tremendous attraction. But the commissioner raised hell. So I said to him: 'Commissioner, this is his belief. Do you scold Christian kids for crossing themselves and kneeling before a fight?' Ray Arcel, trainer emeritus.

For Jackie Kid Berg fighting in the streets of the East End was as natural as breathing, he recalls: My gang was mainly from my street. Sam Bibbikraut was the leader. Then there was Gussie, Sammy Front, Morrie Greenberg, maybe one or two others, younger brothers. We grew up together. I could lick Sam – I could lick any of them. I was fighting every day, to survive! I had to fight, it was my way, you see – When I was in the street, if anybody hit somebody I knew, I used to shield that person. I never wanted people to take liberties with me. What's right is right, but I never wanted people to take liberties. I always landed the first punch, whatever happened. I'd get in first. If I'm right or wrong, I'm going to hit you, I'm not going to wait until you bang me one. Gangs of gentiles used to sing bad things to us on the streets, often in front of old Jewish people and when we kids used to hear that, well, we didn't like it! Our spirits used to be on fire, we'd burn! We would make a dash for them. We were always fighting. You had to fight! It was part of my nature.

Incredibly self disciplined, he schooled himself in the traditional standup British style of boxing. On crossing the Atlantic he reverted to the more elemental 'blood and snot' form of brawling and



made a big splash with the throngs on the American continent, to the chagrin of the traditionalist British boxing establishment. This perpetual motion, piston-shooting dynamo they called The Whitechapel Windmill, tossed leather non-stop from every possible angle until his ring foe dropped from sheer exhaustion. He was neither boxer nor puncher. There was little science to his methodology – he just bored in and flailed away. But the theoretical underpinning of his tactics was based on the Napoleonic dictum that the best defence is a good offence. The majority of his opponents crumbled under the sheer volume of the attack.

Ray Arcel, his legendary trainer of many world champions, attempted to understand his wild nature:

"Berg was a tense bundle of nervous energy, impulsive and fanatically superstitious. Training him was one nightmare after another. We could never let him out of our sight. Normally you tuck fighters into bed and switch off the lights and lock the door from the outside for insurance. Now you can relax. But with Berg, lights-out signalled the start of war-games. Would he or wouldn't he break loose? We put extra padlocks on the door, barred the window and stationed somebody in the room to watch him. Somehow he still escaped, off chasing girls."

The only ritual that seemed to calm him, as well as fighting, were his religious superstitions: Marching into a fight, a tallit was hung around his shoulders and a tephillin was strapped around his arms and forehead. The normally riotous fight mob remained silent as he went through the long dramatic ritual of unwinding the leather straps from around his body, kissing them tenderly and placing them in a gold embroidered velvet bag. He handed the bag to me saying, 'Please take care of this, Ray.' Some sceptics sneered: 'He goes through that routine to pull in the cloak and suitors. It's using religion for financial gain. It's sacrilegious.' True, he wasn't what you call a religious Jew. But he was superstitious beyond reason.

When I put the question to him one day, he seemed embarrassed: 'It's comforting to have God on your side no matter what your doing,' he told me soberly. During his peak, there seemed to be the mark of Divine spirit with Berg. He moved to the United States in 1928 and the following year he scored a win over junior welterweight champion Mushy Callahan in a non-title bout. Berg opened the 1930 campaign with a decision over the great Tony Canzoneri and promoters quickly matched him with Callahan again with the title on the line:

"...and then Berg shot a left for the face while driving a right for the body. Callahan plunged at once with a double-handed attack for the mid-section and they were at it like a pair of tiger cats. Fists were flying with the utmost rapidity, with Berg speeding up and lashing out almost faster



than the eye could follow. Callahan tried an uppercut, but Berg caught this on his forearms and at once hooked a right to the head and shot a left to the mouth. Again the Englishman speeded up and, swinging or hooking with all the force and speed of which he was capable, drove the American to the ropes. Smashed up against these the American had to lean on his man and was reproved by the referee. "

The end came a few seconds before the start of the eleventh round: "The referee was leaning over the ropes with his back to the ring. A towel appeared like a comet in Callahan's corner. There was a gasp of surprise; then cheers and yells that shook the

smoke-laden air. Callahan had retired. His once broken nose had been broken again. His left eye was closed. Misery – dazed misery – was reflected on his badly used face." *Boxing Magazine*, Feb 26th 1930.

Berg returned to the United States and made six successful title defences. He also scored a 10-round decision over Kid Chocolate in a non-title fight. Chocolate, who later won the world featherweight and junior lightweight titles, was unbeaten in 160 amateur and pro fights before meeting Berg. By the year's end, Berg was considered the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

**Thursday Feb 17, 2005**  
**Jack "Kid" Berg: This Is The Guy**  
**by Jonathan Rendall**

Listening to Bernard Hopkins attempting to outdo Howard Eastman with apocalyptic descriptions of his early life in the ghetto, I was reminded of my friendship with the late Jack "Kid" Berg, unofficial light-welterweight champion of the world in the early 1930s and first conqueror of the legendary and previously unbeaten Cuban, Kid Chocolate. I am sure Hopkins' upbringing was as hard as he says, but equally certain that in his own early life Berg suffered privations that Hopkins could not hold a candle to. Moreover, in the three years of our rather bizarre friendship, I certainly never heard Berg complain about it once. Born Judah Bergman in Odessa, Russia, in 1909, the son of a Rabbi, Berg emigrated to London's East End as an infant. He lived in a tenement with no hot water, bathroom or heating and had little, if any, formal education to speak of. Gentile gangs attempted to beat the daylight out of him on a regular basis. Living an independent, urchin life straight from the pages of Oliver, Berg survived by picking pockets and removing men's hats by stringing cotton across streets at head level. Berg



would retrieve the hats and the men, grateful and unsuspecting, would tip him a shilling.

Berg showed me around that tenement in the late 1980s, when it was inhabited by Bangladeshi families. Apparently a statue of him has now been put up nearby, but I have not seen it. He made his professional debut when just 14 years old, at a time when boy boxers were commonplace and the hero of Jewish and indeed British boxing was Ted “Kid” Lewis, from whom Berg took his moniker. Many of his early bouts took place

at backstreet venues with names like Premierland and Wonderland. Berg also showed me round what remained of Premierland, by then a disused warehouse in London’s City district with weeds growing out of its window frames.

Berg could not believe the state it had got into, nor that Ted ‘Kid’ Lewis was not still around somewhere nearby. A highly intelligent and, it has to be said, crafty man when necessary, almost like an 80-year-old Just William character when I met him, Berg was in a certain amount of denial about his age, and tended to think he was still 25 years old, particularly when it came to women.

Berg was barely 20 when he snapped the long unbeaten run of Kid Chocolate at the Polo Grounds in Harlem in June 1930, in what was a huge, if forgotten, fight. He received a purse of \$66,000, a massive payday at the time, and one that set him up for life. The junior-welterweight title was not widely recognized, however, and in Berg’s biggest opportunity, a challenge for the world lightweight title against Tony Canzoneri in Chicago Stadium in April 1931, he gave perhaps the worst performance of his career, losing in three rounds and barely landing a blow. In truth, quite apart from the obstacle of the formidable Canzoneri, Berg was severely weight-drained, the lightweight limit by then a step too far for his 5ft 9in frame. That is what the record books say, anyway. I am not so sure about that figure for his height. Jack was quite vain about it and had concealed insteps inside the Cuban heels he wore.

He was quite something to look at. After retiring from boxing, he became a movie stuntman, working mainly in Westerns. This gave him a wardrobe for life, and he was seldom without a bootlace tie. He smoked cigars incessantly – Optimos that were sent to him from New York.

All his defeats apart from Canzoneri, Berg put down to the effects of womanising, which he believed weakened his legs, but which he said he couldn’t resist. He was particularly defiant about his defeat by Billy Petrolle, who had him down seven times - but only because, Berg insisted, “I was messing around with this particular broad.” Most of his big fights took place in the United States, and he had a penchant for the American vernacular. He finished boxing in



1946 at the age of 35, with an extraordinary record of 157 victories (with 61 knockouts), 26 losses, and nine draws. Known for his prodigious punch-rate, Berg's moniker was "The Whitechapel Windmill" or, in America, "Whirlwind."

He was managed by Frankie Jacobs and trained by the late Ray Arcel, that most distinguished and honourable of trainers, who saw off the Mob in the form of Frankie Carbo et al and regarded Berg as almost a son and his favourite fighter, even though Arcel trained many other champions, including Roberto Duran. Berg had arrived in his custody off a boat from England in 1928, when he was 18 and,

according to Arcel, "Looked like a little girl." Arcel was soon disabused of such notions. "Not only could he fight," Arcel once recalled. "But he thought he was God's gift to the ladies. You had to watch him like a hawk."

I first met Berg through a publican and former professional bantamweight named Gary Davidson, who used to run the Thomas A'Beckett on the Old Kent Road, a famous boxing pub in South London and very much in fight game territory. Davidson was one of the good guys, which is saying something in life, let alone in boxing. Tragically he was taken prematurely by motor-neurone disease while barely in middle age, but at great expense had made the Beckett into a worthy shrine to the Noble Art. The last time I looked it was empty and virtually derelict, but then it was thriving. Davidson had commissioned a giant painting of all Britain's world champions, and Berg was the only one I didn't recognize. Davidson soon put me right, saying, "With no disrespect to the others, that is the greatest fighter this country has produced."

Most of my meetings with Jack started off at his large house in West London, where he lived with his wife Morya, a striking-looking woman, and ended up somewhere in Soho. Despite his age Berg was still an active driver in his little red car, which he drove extremely aggressively, indeed specialising in curb side confrontations. Shortly before I met him, he had been arrested for chinning another, much younger motorist, but turned up in court in a borrowed wheelchair and was let off.

Berg's favourite place in Soho was Kettner's, now part of a pizza chain, but in Berg's gallivanting days a renowned brothel. Its change of usage seemed to have passed him by, leading to some interesting exchanges. I became so engrossed in Berg's extraordinary story that I travelled to Cuba on his behalf to find Kid Chocolate, who was rumoured to be alive after years of being presumed dead. For a time there had also been a Kid Chocolate impersonator in a Chicago bar, who was rumbled when one of the real Chocolate's former opponents walked in and asked him if he knew how to stop a punch. This "Kid Chocolate" demonstrably didn't.

After a few days in the ruined but beautiful streets of Havana, having employed several street kids to help in the search, I was led to the house of the actual Chocolate, real name Eligio Sardinias, who at 79 was a year younger than Jack. He was a rum-sodden alcoholic but obliging,

and one could not help feeling for him greatly – professional boxing had of course been banned by Fidel Castro, and Chocolate had been backed by the now despised “Americanos.” He was an unwanted symbol of an unwanted past. He lived in appalling squalor but in the same large house that his ring earnings had bought – for years it housed a famous gym, and Sugar Ray Robinson, a friend, was pictured training there in the 1950s.

Before the rum got to him Chocolate talked lucidly and remembered Berg well, but said a Cuban named Kid Charrol was the best boxer he had met. He showed me what remained of his old gown, in brown silk with “Chocolate Kid” inscribed on the back. A few weeks later he was reported dead, news which astonished Berg when I told him. “He was only a young man,” he remarked.

I also accompanied Berg to New York for the 90th birthday party of Ray Arcel. There, among a stellar cast that included Holmes, Graziano, Zale, LaMotta and Pep, as well as contemporary champions such as Breland and McGirt, Berg stole the show with an emotional speech about how much Arcel meant to him. On the way out, I was collared by an octogenarian former fighter who, pointing at Berg, announced, ‘Forget all the others. This is the guy. This guy is really the one.’

Coincidentally there was a musical named “Legs,” about the ‘30s gangster Legs Diamond, playing on Broadway at the time. Berg knew Diamond well, having once been threatened with death by him for attempting to chat up Diamond’s girlfriend at the Harding Hotel, where Berg lived one floor beneath Mae West. “We had to do a lot of fast talking to get out of it,” was Arcel’s recollection. Berg had also been au fait with Harlem nightlife, and was a regular at the Cotton Club, whose benefactor, Owney Madden (played in the movie by Bob Hoskins) had been a big Berg fan.

Perhaps unwisely, I agreed to Berg’s repeated requests to go to Harlem to inspect the Polo Grounds, even though I knew they had been demolished long ago. First we overshot and landed in South Bronx, then back in Harlem were accosted by a street gang that were disbelieving when I explained that Berg had been a former fighter.

“Oh yeah, how many KOs you have?” asked the gang leader. “Quite a few,” Berg said. “You want me to try it?” After that the gang could not have been more helpful amid the bleak housing project that had once been the site of the Polo Grounds, even pointing out some remaining steps upon which Berg said he was convinced one of his cornerman had been stabbed on the way to the ring to face Chocolate.

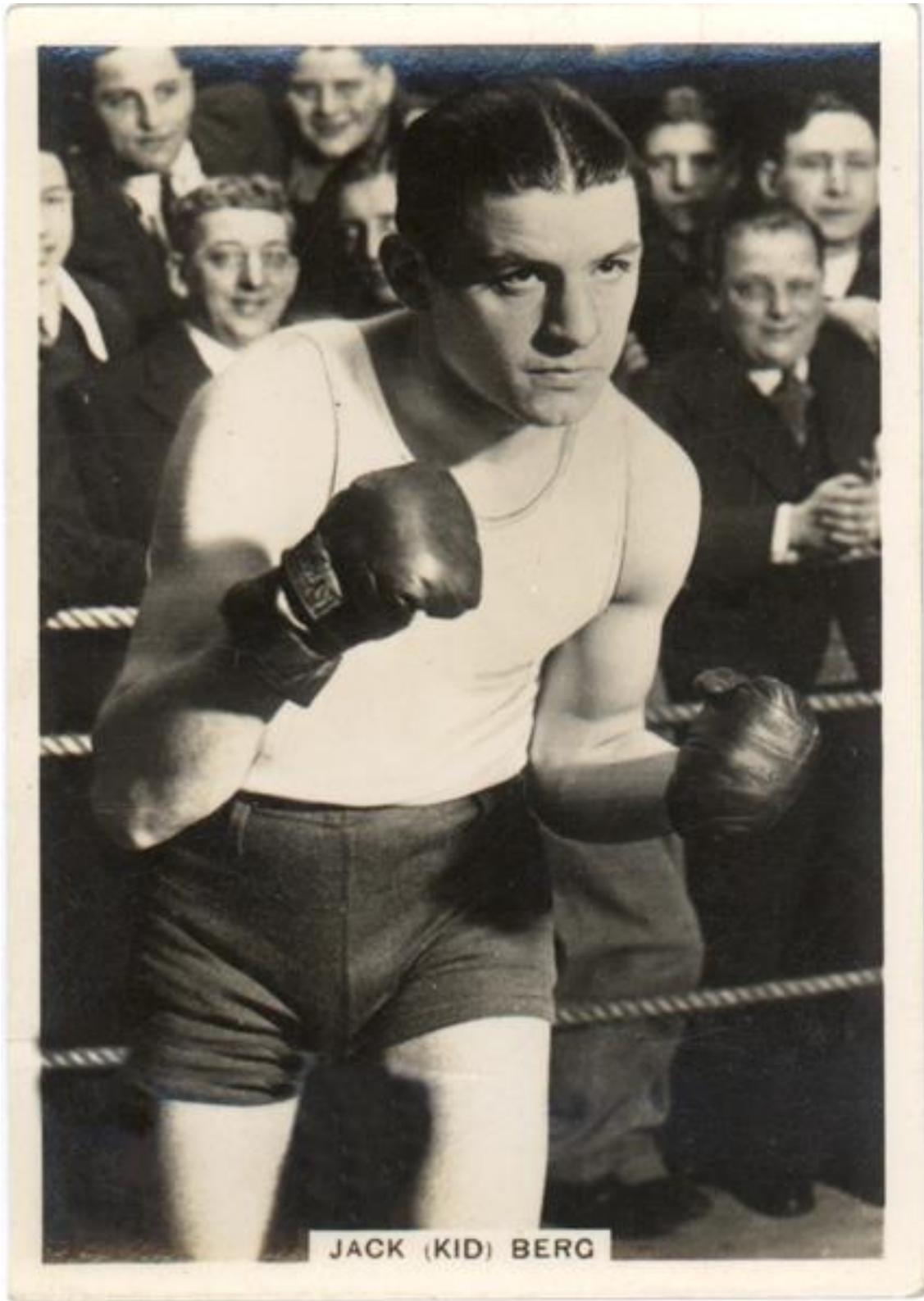
I also took Berg to the Roseland Dancehall and paid 25 bucks to a rather beautiful 60-year-old



Latin woman so she would dance with him. However, Berg abandoned her after one dance, saying she was too old. Then we went to Gallagher's steak restaurant, where there was a picture of Berg up, and he showed his pick-pocketing skills were still in tact by removing the watches of about a dozen members of the Puerto Rican police force who were on a training exercise in New York. They were not pleased, even when Jack gave the watches back.

After we got back to England I began managing a fighter named "Sweet C" McMillan whom Berg took great interest in, declaring him to be the "new Kid Chocolate." He took even more interest in a Jewish fighter called Gary "Kid" Jacobs from Scotland, a useful welterweight apparently named in the tradition of Kid Lewis and Berg. Jacobs's management did not know what they had let themselves in for by adopting this marketing strategy. Berg trailed him like a protective bloodhound, saying "Gary is the new me." Once in the gym when we were there, Jacobs, who was sensible enough to play along with it, asked Berg if he had any specific tips. "Lay off women before a fight," Berg replied. "Just remember what happened with me and Billy Petrolle."

In his last year or so Berg moved to the Essex coast. Morya died before him. So did Ray Arcel. To the end he followed his usual routines. He remained friends with Kid Lewis' son, Mortan, to the last, believing he had a protective duty towards him, and still went to Soho. Some regarded Berg as something of a pest, but I felt the opposite. He was someone who resolutely refused to countenance the banality of ordinary life, and was determined to live a mythic one, visiting again and again its landmarks. He himself had established them, after all.



Berg

was a great admirer of the young Mike Tyson, saying, "Mike's a rough boy, like me." He fervently believed Tyson had "come looking for him," in a benign way, while on a British promotional tour in 1987. Maybe he had. As such, it is likely Berg would have approved of

Bernard Hopkins, another "rough boy." Berg's was quite a life. And one I feel Hopkins would appreciate, too.

**Chester Times, Chester PA.  
11 September 1931**

**BERG, FLOORED IN FIRST ROUND,  
BATTLES GAMELY  
Lightweight Champion Wins 9 of 15 Rounds in  
Polo Grounds Bout**

NEW YORK. Sept. 11

The shoes of Frank Erne, Bat Nelson, Joe Gans, Ad Wolgast and Benny Leonard are none too big today for Tony Canzoneri, worthy champion of the lightweight division. The likeable little Italian, holder of the 135 lb. and 140 lb. titles and former bantamweight champion, proved his right to the purple robes last night when he administered a sound beating to Jack (Kid) Berg, Britain's best. It was the third and "rubber" meeting between the two rivals.

The Briton's plan of pursuing his usual boring-in tactics were altered in the very first round when the champion almost won by a knockout. He went after Jackie's bad left eye right from the start and soon opened a deep cut over the damaged optic. A left hook to the chin, followed by two rights, dropped Berg for a count of eight. This knockdown, coupled with the memory of his knockout by Tony in the third round at Chicago last April, made Berg overcautious and thereafter he seldom tore in with his usual fury.

Berg fought furiously in the third round and his adherents in the crowd yelled loud encouragement. But the English lad's efforts were wild and misdirected against the superb boxing and cool fighting of Canzoneri. particularly was this so through the last minute of the round when they stood toe to toe in a furious exchange of right hand smashes. Nothing daunted, Berg responded to the bell for the fourth round and thrilled the crowd by fighting Canzoneri all over the ring in his characteristic, tireless attack. Canzoneri missed awkwardly with, most of his savage lefts and rights for the jaw and was pressed repeatedly to the ropes, where Berg worked both hands to the body and face.

Through the fifth round Berg pressed his attack amid the encouraging shouts of the crowd. Canzoneri tried with every punch in his wide repertoire to stave off the persistent attacks of the challenger in a defensive battle but without success. At times Canzoneri reached Berg with smashing drives to the body but Berg pressed in, flailing with both arms to the head and body in a ceaseless fire.

Canzoneri subjected Berg to a withering fire of lefts and rights to the body and a savage drilling of rights to the jaw, face and head in a wonderful recovery in the sixth round. He evaded Berg's eager punching, but could not discourage the challenger. Despite the cross fire to which he was subjected, Berg plodded doggedly on, fighting grimly until the bell ended the round.

Canzoneri again had . Berg in distress in the seventh, round., but the English. lad fought on pluckily. The champion staggered his rival with a succession of left hooks to the jaw 'opening the round. Shifting his attack, Canzoneri landed repeatedly with wicked left hooks to the body and several times almost upset Berg with a volley of right crosses to the jaw and head. Against this punching Berg was helpless, but the English, lad never stopped plunging in on the attack.

The eighth round was a punishing one for Berg and produced an uproar among the crowd. This uproar was directly due to the State Athletic Commission's ruling which does not recognize foul punches.

Pounding Berg steadily with a savage fire of lefts and rights to the body Canzoneri was meeting Berg's charges with telling counters. Suddenly the champion landed a terrific left for the body which erratic and went palpably low. Berg sank in his tracks his face contorted with pain, but the State Athletic Commission rules against recognizing fouls from low punches and while the crowd 'yelled disapproval Referee Haley counted over the fallen challenger.

Canzoneri won nine of the fifteen rounds. Berg took three and three were even.

**TONY'S DIADEM SAVED BY RULE**  
**New Law Forbids Bout to**  
**End in Foul— And Champ Hit Low**

NEW YORK, Sept. 11

Although he proved himself superior in every respect to challenger Jack (Kid) Berg of England, Tony Canzoneri today owed his retention of world's lightweight championship to the rules of the New York Athletic Commission.

Canzoneri scored a clear-cut victory over Berg in their 15-round bout at the Polo Grounds last night, but had the bout been staged in London, where it was scheduled originally, the ' championship would have changed hands when Berg went to the floor from a foul in the eighth round.

"Under the New York Commission's rules a fighter cannot win or lose on a foul and despite the protests of the 18,000 spectators, Referee Patsy Haley counted over Berg just as though he had been sent to the floor by a legitimate blow.

Canzoneri made no attempt to take advantage of the foul, oven though, also under the rules. It cost, him the loss of the round, he stood back after Berg rose at the eight count and gave the Briton a chance to recover before resuming the attack.

Except for the round given him by the champion's low blow Berg won only one other round and held Canzoneri even in only two. His best rounds were the fifth and sixth In which he earned a draw and the seventh and eighth which he won.

**Globe Gazette  
Mason city, Iowa  
8 August 1930**

**Cuban Flash In First Defeat of His Ring Career  
Decision Splits Crowd and Small Fights start In National Ball Park**

A battered little bundle of machinery sat huddled in his corner at the Polo grounds last night after ten of the most furious rounds of slam-bang boxing New York has witnessed in many a moon. As Joe Humphries walked toward him, white official-slips in hand, Kid Chocolate leapt up in anticipation of being proclaimed the winner, only to stumble back and fall into a sobbing heap in his corner as Humphries suddenly checked himself, turned and lifted the hand of Jackie (Kid) Berg in token of triumph.

In those few dramatic moments, pulse-stirring to a crowd of 25,000 that had been thrilled by a sensational battle of little fellows, the winning streak that Kid Chocolate appeared to have kept intact was brought to a sudden end, snapped after two years of unbroken victory by the lean little English whirlwind from whitechapel.

**Berg 2-1 Victor.**

Entirely on the strength of his tireless aggressiveness, Berg won by a two to one vote of the officials. The British lightweight received the verdict of Referee Patsy Haley, grey-haired little veteran, and one of the judges, Joe Agnello. The vote of Charles F. Mathison, the second judge, went to the Cuban featherweight.

So close was the battle and so partisan the sympathies of the crowd that the decision, plus the announcer's uncertainty, provoked a big demonstration of disapproval. Chocolate received an ovation that drowned out the cheers for Berg. So heated was the scene that fights broke out around ringside and in the stands of the National league ballpark.

**Division of Opinion.**

Amongst the ringside experts a sharp division of opinion existed, although a slight majority appeared to regard the decision as fair. Chocolate seemed to have the edge in the first three rounds, as well as the sixth, seventh and eighth. Berg held margins in the fourth, fifth, ninth and tenth.

Chocolate landed the cleaner more effective blows. He had Berg somewhat groggy with a sensational attack in the third round, the most exciting of the entire fight.

The flashing, ebony keed was also the faster, better boxer whenever he could keep away from the crowding, mauling Englishman. Berg, however, was unceasingly the aggressor. His punches were seldom damaging but they were more persistent and landed oftener. This forcing, plus the fact that Berg unquestionably made the stronger finish apparently swung the decision in his favor.

### **Berg Has Weight Edge.**

Berg, with better than a nine pound pull in the weights and used this to good advantage as he continually crowded, mauled, and harassed the Cuban Negro. Chocolate, meeting his first defeat in two years of professional Fighting.