

Name: Tommy Burns
Career Record: [click](#)
Alias: The Little Giant of Hanover
Birth Name: Noah Brusso
Nationality: Canadian
Birthplace: Chesley, ON, CAN
Hometown: Detroit MI/Vancouver B.C.
Born: 1881-06-17
Died: 1955-05-10
Age at Death: 73
Stance: Orthodox
Height: 5' 7"
Reach: 74 in
Manager: [Harry McKenna](#)
Division: Heavyweight

Career Overview



Tommy Burns is primarily known in the United States for being the man to break the colour line and lose the heavyweight championship to [Jack Johnson](#), who was himself the world's first black heavyweight champ. The so-called "embarrassingly-one sided pummeling" he suffered at Johnson's hands has forever scarred Burns' legacy in that country, but he was nonetheless a quality fighter who managed some significant accomplishments during his career, despite frequently being at a tremendous size disadvantage. Much of American sporting opinion on Burns is based on inept reporting by the great novelist Jack London who was supposedly at ringside. London later apologized to Burns for certain liberalities with the truth. In the rest of the world Tommy Burns was regarded as one of the best men of his age, and he proved it by beating everyone put up against him.

Early Years

Born Noah Brusso on the outskirts of Hanover, Ontario, he was raised in a log cabin, the twelfth of thirteen children. His abusive and penniless father, a cabinetmaker, passed away when Noah was still a boy. A troublesome youth, he left school at a young age and spent much of his teenage years and young adulthood drifting between menial labor jobs. During a stint as a baggage handler aboard a steamer on Lake Michigan, Burns jumped ship in Detroit, where he would begin his professional boxing career.

Known for his competitive and often violent athleticism since his childhood, boxing proved the

perfect outlet for young Noah. Only a lightweight when he first fought for money in 1900, he made short work of several local pugs, building a reputation throughout the Detroit era as a quick-handed scrapper with a stinging right hand punch. A middleweight by 1902, he won regard as Michigan's state champion in that division with a seventh round knockout of the otherwise forgettable [Tom McCune](#). This led to a match up with [Mike Schreck](#), an undefeated southpaw heavyweight from Cincinnati. Despite being at a tremendous size disadvantage, Noah managed to go the ten round distance, losing the referee's decision. Recovering well from the setback of his first defeat, Noah defended his Michigan state championship three times before the close of 1903.

On January 28, 1904, Noah nearly killed opponent [Ben O'Grady](#), sending his foe into a coma. Though O'Grady survived, boxing was still an illicit enterprise at the time and Noah was forced to flee Detroit to avoid arrest for assault and participating in an illegal prizefight. The incident made newspapers internationally and, to protect his mother from the scandal, he subsequently changed his name to Ed Burns and, a bit later, Tommy Burns. In order to avoid further near-tragedies like the O'Grady incident, Tommy put on weight and began campaigning in the light heavyweight class, where he hoped the larger men could handle his punching power better.

Burns also abandoned Detroit for locales for western cities where opposition to boxing was less organized. First Chicago and then Seattle became his home. Considered one of the sport's rising stars by now, he managed to get a fight with [Philadelphia Jack O'Brien](#), a popular and experienced light heavyweight respected in some circles the cleverest fighter alive. O'Brien won the six round bout, but Burns was undeterred and continued to face top level opposition. Occasionally he packed on the pounds to take on heavyweights. On May 2, 1905 he won recognition as the middleweight champion of the Pacific Coast when he defeated [Dave Barry](#) during a twenty round fight in Tacoma, Washington. He continued to face top opponents for the remainder of that year, besting Barry in a rematch, drawing twice with [Hugo Kelly](#), and losing a referee's decision in a bout with the highly regarded [Jack Sullivan](#) in a bout billed as being for the world's middleweight championship.

Meanwhile, the heavyweight division has fallen into chaos. [James J. Jeffries](#), the most dominant heavyweight champion to come along in a generation, had retired undefeated, leaving the title vacant. Jeffries had named [Marvin Hart](#), a 25-3-6 heavyweight from Fern Creek, Kentucky, as his successor after refereeing a bout between Hart and [Jack Root](#) in 1905. But many did not consider Hart a legitimate champion, despite having beaten top contenders like Gus Ruhlin, Sandy Ferguson and Jack Johnson. Most still considered Jeffries the champ. Because of the racism of the era, however, Jack Johnson was barred from getting near a shot at the coveted championship now held by Hart. Thus, in need of a credible opponent against whom he could prove his mettle, Hart granted the appropriately Caucasian Burns a chance.

Burns, though a considerable underdog according to oddsmakers, was already regarded as a master of ring psychology by the time of the Hart fight. In order to upset his opponent on fight night, February 23, 1906, at the Pacific Athletic Club in Los Angeles, California, Tommy came into the ring with an inordinate amount of tape on his hands. His intention was to anger his opponent and the strategy worked. The champion demanded his challenger's hands be retaped, to which Burns replied, "Why Mr. Hart, I didn't think a big champion like you would mind a little

man like me wearing a little tape.” This sparked a vicious argument resulting in Hart’s taking a swing at Burns. When the fight finally got under way, Hart could not control his rage and lost all of what little boxing technique he knew. He continually bull-rushed his smaller opponent, who effortlessly stepped out of the way and counterpunched beautifully for twenty rounds. Referee Charlie Eyton was quick to point to Burns as the winner and the title changed hands on a decision for the first time in history. Tommy was paid the magnificent sum of \$1,650 for his efforts, while Hart, who had insisted that the winner get 70% of the purse, received \$750.

World Champion

Taking six months to enjoy his newfound money and notoriety, Burns did not make his first defense of the championship until October 2, 1906, when he took on [Fireman Jim Flynn](#), a rough-edged up-and-comer known primarily for his raw punching power. Burns felled him in the fifteenth round after a brutal slugging match and then secured a rematch with Philadelphia Jack O’Brien, the future hall of famer who was by this time the reigning light heavyweight champion. This time the pair battled to a twenty-round draw in the eyes of referee Jeffries. But there were many who felt that Burns got the best of the action and, during negotiations for a third fight, O’Brien refused to fight unless Burns would agree to avoid his usual in-fighting tactics. In order to get O’Brien to sign the contract, Burns agreed but then double-crossed the arrangement by telling all to promoter [Tom McCarey](#) on fight night, May 8, 1907. McCarey subsequently went before the audience and declared that all bets were off, revealing the plot. Stunned by the change of events, O’Brien, already sitting on his stool in his corner, had to be shoved out into the ring to fight. He subsequently backpedaled away from the oncoming champion for a full twenty rounds until referee [Charles Eyton](#) granted Burns his decision. Again Burns’ psychological tricks had helped earn him an important victory.

Despite being the world’s champion, Burns was considered the underdog when he faced Australia’s popular national champ, [Bill Squires](#) on July 4, 1907 in Colma, California. Twenty thousand people attended, spurred into buying tickets by the rave write ups that reporters were granting Squires. Come fight time, though, the fight belonged indisputably to the champion. A hard right cross delivered halfway into the opening frame sent the challenger to the deck for the full count in one of the quickest knockouts in heavyweight title fight history. Squires subsequently became a member of Burns’ team of sparring partners and helped him prepare for his next match, against [Gunner Moir](#), England’s national champion. Again Burns was installed as the underdog and again he beat the odds, flattening his much larger opponent inside of ten rounds.

By this time the champion was being frequently hounded by Jack Johnson, who was recognized in many American circles as the only credible challenger for heavyweight laurels in the field. Johnson, as mentioned before, was black, however, and there were many opponents to the making of an interracial heavyweight title bout. Burns, who was known to be a sharp negotiator and promoter, let it be known that he would fight Johnson, but only if he would receive a guarantee of \$30,000, a figure he knew he could eventually command. Meanwhile he reinforced his claim to the World championship by actually going out and fighting the best other countries had to offer, becoming the first heavyweight champion to defend the title outside the United States. He took on and beat: [Jack Palmer](#) in London; [Jem Roche](#) in Dublin; [Jewey Smith](#) and Bill

Squires (again) in Paris; Bill Squires (a third time) in Sydney; and [Bill Lang](#) in Melbourne.

The Johnson Fight

While in Australia, Burns was introduced to fledgling boxing promoter [Hugh D. McIntosh](#), who actually offered Tommy the \$30,000 he required to face outstanding contender Jack Johnson. That amount was twice as much as anything a fight had been paid previously for any single match and the champion, now confronted with a mountain of cash and the need to keep his word, signed the contracts to face Johnson. Burns drew a storm of criticism from conservatives frightened by the prospect of a black man being given a shot at the title, but the champion went on with plans for the fight. On Boxing Day (the day after Christmas), 1908, Burns finally met Johnson, who stood more six inches taller than him and outweighed him by almost thirty pounds. A defensive marvel, Johnson used his greater size to every advantage, using his weight to wear down Burns in clinches, using his reach to keep Burns at bay, and using his muscular frame to land devastating punches on the inside. The champion, still recovering from a battle with influenza, fought a brave fight. He battled into the fourteenth round until police rushed into the ring to stop the fight, despite his insistence that he could carry on. As per previous agreement, Johnson was awarded the decision by referee McIntosh and declared the new champion.

Having suffered a damaging and humiliating defeat and having alienated many racist American fans by allowing the title to fall into the hands of a black man, Burns did not return to the ring until April 7, 1910, when he fought a rematch with [Bill Lang](#), who was by this time recognized as both the British Empire champion and Australian champion. Though Lang was the younger and larger man, Burns won a twenty-round decision. This was the last notable victory of his career, as he fought only sporadically for the next decade. His final bout, against young [Joe Beckett](#), for the British Empire title, took place on July 16, 1920 and ended in the seventh, when the thirty-nine year old Burns could take no more.

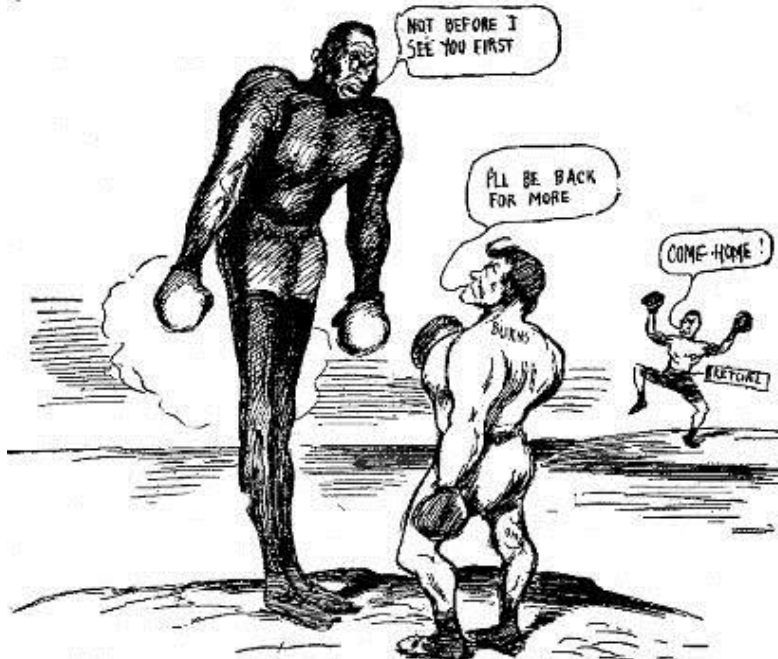
As he faded away from the boxing world, Burns enjoyed several different careers. He managed the careers of several boxers, promoted the sport in Calgary and New Orleans, owned and operated a successful clothing emporium in Calgary, Alberta. He bought and ran a pub in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1921, and eventually became an evangelist preacher. He died in Vancouver of a heart attack at age seventy-three. In 1996 he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. To this day, he remains the only heavyweight champion to win eight consecutive title defenses by knockout.

**CAN TOMMY BURNS WHIP BIG JACK JOHNSON?
THERE'S A GREAT FIGHT COMING IN AUSTRALIA**



New York Times

26 December 1908



**Negro's Punishment of
Champion Burns Causes
Authorities
to End Bout.
DECIDED ON POINTS
of Saturday Morning's Battle In
Australia Received Last Night
in New York. Heavyweight
Championship Fight,**

SYDNEY, Saturday noon, . Dec.
26.

Jack Johnson, the big negro from
Galveston, Texas is the world's

champion, heavyweight pugilist. He won the title to-day in the big arena at Ruschutters Bay from Tommy Burns, the French-Canadian, who had held it since James J. Jeffries relinquished it, and after a chase of Burns that had led half way round the world.

The end came in the fourteenth round when the police, seeing: Burns tottering and unable to defend himself from the savage blows of his opponent, mercifully stopped the fight. Previously it had been arranged that if the police interfered a decision should be rendered on points, and referee McIntosh without hesitation declared the big black man the winner, for all through the fight he had shown himself Burns's master in every style of fighting.

Burns in an interview after he had gone To his dressing room said: "I did the best I could and fought hard. Johnson was too big and his reach was too great."

Johnson appeared fresh after the fight, while Burns's eyes were badly puffed and his mouth swollen to twice its normal size. The Canadian fought a game battle and showed Indomitable pluck, but he was no match for the big- black Texan. The fight was for a purse of \$35,000 of which Burns received \$30,000" and Johnson £5,000. The ring was a 24-foot one, and Was pitched In the centre of a big arena built especially for the purpose at Rushcutters Bay. The bout was to have been for twenty rounds. The day dawned overcast and cool.

Thousands of persons from all parts of the country were attracted to the scene of the encounter, and many reached there Christmas night and slept in the open. .They came by street cars, automobiles, carriages, and on horseback, and at 10 o'clock this morning, one hour before the fight was scheduled to start, every seat was occupied. The crowd was estimated at between 18,000 and 20,000 persons, and It kept perfect order throughout the fight.

Before the contestants entered the ring, " Bill " Squires, who thrice has been defeated by Burns, challenged the winner. Burns weighed in at 108 pounds and Johnson at 192. The betting was 7 to 4 on Burns at the start, but it veered after a .few rounds to 2 to 1 on Johnson. The spectators conceded that Johnson's victory was due to his physical advantages over burns, his superior knowledge of the fighting same, and his unruffled demeanor while being taunted by the champion. The stakes were paid the men while they were in the ring.

At 10:42 o'clock Johnson entered the arena accompanied by his seconds, Sam Fitzpatrick, Mullins, Unholz, Lang, and 'Bryant. Wild cheering greeted him and the big black man turned and bowed to all four sides of the ring.

Just as Johnson took his seat Burns appeared. He was smiling and the plaudits of the spectators were even more enthusiastic than those accorded Johnson. Burns took up his position in the western corner of the ring surrounded by his seconds, Keating, O'Keefe, O'Donnell, Burke, and Russell. When the cheering had died down somewhat Johnson crossed over and shook Burns by the hand. The Canadian glanced at the big hands of the Texan and noticed that both were covered with bandages. Fearful that perhaps they might not be of the soft kind, he scrutinized them closely, but finding them to his satisfaction he made no objection. The announcement was made that if during the contest the police should interfere and stop it the referee would immediately give a decision based on points scored.

When Burns stripped it was noticed that he wore elastic bandages about his elbows. Johnson shouted across the ring half angrily: " You must take those off." Then the men met in 'the centre of the and for a few minutes argued the question. Then they retired again to their corners, but Burns did not remove the bandages.

From Johnson's seconds came the announcement' that their man refused to fight unless Burns took off the wraps around his elbows, and it looked as though there was a possibility of the fight not taking place, for Burns was stubborn and Johnson insistent on his point. The referee, however, here took a hand in the controversy and said that the wearing of bandages was not against the rules. Johnson still demurred, nevertheless, and Burns, with a show of Impatience, had his seconds unwind the tape. His action brought forth from the spectators a tremendous round of applause.

At 11:15 o'clock Johnson and Burns posed for a moving picture machine, and, having received final instructions from Referee McIntosh, retired to their corners. Then the battle began.

Fight by Rounds.

FIRST ROUND

After a few moments of preliminary sparring Johnson reached Burns with a sharp uppercut, and the Canadian went to the floor, remaining there for the count or eight. He signaled to his seconds that he was all right, however, and when he arose sailed In for Johnson's body. Johnson swung a hard right to the head, and Burns staggered backward nearly across the ring from the Impact of the blow. Then Burns, rushing in, planted a right of great force on Johnson s chin, and by an excellent display of boxing warded off a return. Johnson, nevertheless, managed to put through a stinging left to the head at the sound of the gong.

SECOND ROUND

When the gong clanged Johnson yelled across to the approaching Burns, " Come right on," and he swung his right and landed hard on Burns chin. The champions ankle gave way under him and he went down. He was up immediately, however, and Johnson got to close quarters with him and placed right and left to face and body. Burns's left eye here commenced to swell. Johnson thus far had the better of the battle. The big black man was coming all the time, and he swung a terrific left Into Burns's stomach. Burns was doing but little. He. was bleeding from the mouth, and apparently was tired. The men were clinched as the bell rang.

THIRD ROUND

Burns swung his right to Johnson's head and then did some wonderful execution at in-fighting,

chopping his right to the ribs frequently. Johnson during the round landed some terrific blows to the kidneys.

FOURTH ROUND

the men met In the centre of the ring Johnson shot a heavy right into Burns ribs. The men talked wildly to one another, each seemingly intent upon getting the other excited and landing the money winning punch. During the jeering they sparred fiercely, but few blows being struck. Then Johnson swung left, to the body, and Burns brought right to head. Johnson, closing in, threw a terrific right and left to the head of the , Canadian. The bell found the men In a hard clinch.

FIFTH ROUND

Apparently refreshed from his minute's rest, Burns started the round briskly, landing his right on Johnson's head and punching the body with both hands. Johnson managed to slip over a few rights to the head during the round.

SIXTH ROUND

Johnson rushed, .and Burns clinched. Breaking loose, however, with one hand -Johnson swung his right a dozen times into the white man's ribs. Burns jolted Johnson's body frequently, and swung his right hard over the ribs and put a stiff left to the stomach several, times. Johnson, however, treated these blows as a joke, laughing at the crowd and making sarcastic remarks to his opponent as he hustled Burns Into a corner and scored a couple of rights to the body.

SEVENTH ROUND

Johnson rushed Burns across the ring, dealing out rights in which there was no mercy. Burns got a left to Johnson's jaw, and Johnson raised a lump under Burns's right eye in return. Burns here seemed to be losing strength. Johnson was landing repeatedly on Burns eye, meanwhile addressing the people about the ringside, end though Tommy was working dexterously at infighting, he placed several terrific blows on Burns's ribs, dropping him to the floor for a few seconds.

EIGHTH ROUND

Burns's eyes were puffed up and he was bleeding from the mouth when he emerged from his corner. The white man's blows apparently had little effect on the Texan, who went severely about belaboring the head of the champion.

NINTH ROUND

" Come on, Tommy; swing your right! " yelled Johnson as the gong rang. Burns responded by calling the negro a *" yellow dog."* There was not very much fighting — probably more talking — during this round.

TENTH ROUND

Both men seemed tiring. Johnson still used his fists effectively on Burns's head and stomach and Burns was doing all he could in reply. His blows, however, lacked steam.

ELEVENTH ROUND

The perspiration pouring off the body of Johnson made it look not unlike highly polished walnut. Burns tried to cross his right over, but Johnson cleverly avoided him, meantime laughing at the champion Burns was outclassed, and Johnson apparently was invulnerable. When the bell rang Burns limped to his corner,

TWELFTH ROUND

Again Johnson sailed in, and Burns took a tremendous lot of punishment gamely. His jaw was greatly swollen,

'THIRTEENTH ROUND

Johnson continued to play for the injured eye and the bleeding mouth of Burns, which was swollen twice its normal size. Blow after blow the colored man rained upon him, and the gong alone saved the white man from defeat, for he was reeling and groggy as it rang.

During the intermission between the thirteenth and fourteenth rounds the police officials consulted together, and the probability is that they will stop the fight in the next round. Referee McIntosh went to Burns's corner and had a talk with the champion, who declared that he was strong. McIntosh then asked the police not to interfere.

FOURTEENTH ROUND

Johnson went right after Burns when time was called. The white man warily backed away, but Johnson, following him up, dropped Burns with a heavy right to the head. "One, two, three," slowly counted the referee, and Burns remained down until eight seconds had been tolled off. When he arose Johnson flew at him like a tiger, and, using both hands unmercifully, he soon had the champion tottering. The police then jumped into the ring and stopped the fight.

The referee immediately declared Johnson the winner. He added that he considered it the best fight he ever had witnessed in Australia, and that both men had fought fairly.

FIRST NEGRO CHAMPION.

Johnson Also Only Colored Man to Fight for Heavyweight Title.

Jack Johnson is the first negro who ever won the world's heavy-weight pugilistic championship — in fact, he is the only negro who ever was permitted to battle for the title. He was born in Galveston, Texas, in 1878, and began his ring career In 1901.

Burns was born in Hanover, Ontario, in 1881, and started fighting when he was 19 years old. He is 5 feet 7 ¼ inches in height and weighs, when trained for battle, about 175 pounds. Burns always was a rough-and-ready fighter, who delighted to sail in and mix things with his adversary.

Favored with unusual length of arm (his reach measuring 74 ½ inches,) Burns has proved himself a dangerous man at close range. Despite the fact that Johnson overtopped him in height by 6 ½ inches, Burns had the better of the argument in reach by 1 ¾ inches. A purse of £35,000 was hung up for the battle, which was scheduled to go twenty rounds. Of this amount Burns demanded and received \$30,000, this sum to be paid him despite the outcome of the fight. Johnson had to be satisfied with \$5,000 and return transportation for himself and his manager, Sam Fitzpatrick.

According to reports both Johnson and Burns bet heavily on themselves at the prevailing odds, which slightly favored Burns at the ringside. The men fought before what probably was the largest crowd that ever witnessed a pugilistic contest. Burns did his training at Darling Point, while Johnson got in condition at Manley, a seaside suburb. Besides a retinue of: skillful trainers, who gave the men daily practice at the game of hit, stop, and get away, both Burns and Johnson followed American training methods by doing hard road work. Each man picked- up a lot of loose change by giving training exhibitions twice a week at the Stadium.

Since James J. Jeffries retired and Tommy Burns claimed the championship, Johnson has been trying to get the Canadian to meet him and he has trailed him through the United States and even to England In quest of a match. It was not until Mr. McIntosh, the promoter of this fight, and who also acted as referee, offered a purse of \$35,000 for a cattle at Rushcutter's Bay, a suburb of Sydney, that Burns consented to meet Johnson. Then he stipulated how the money should be split up, the size of the ring, and all the conditions surrounding the fight. Johnson immediately accepted and sailed from London for Australia to begin training.

Johnson, during his ring career has fought sixty-four battles, and twenty-two of his opponents have gone down to defeat by the knockout route. Prominent among those who have been put to sleep by the big negro are Jack Jeffries, a brother of the former heavyweight champion, who was knocked out by Johnson at Los Angeles in 1902 in five rounds, and Bob Fitzsimmons, who, in Philadelphia In 1907, was able to withstand Johnson's shifty work but two rounds-, Fitzsimmons, however, had an injured arm when he engaged in this bout. Johnson has lost but two fights, one a twenty-round decision to Marvin Hart and the other on a foul to Joe Jeanette.

Not since the days of James J. Corbett has the prize ring seen so perfect a looking boxer as Johnson. Long and lithe and graceful, he is as true as an arrow in planting his blows. Especially deft is he with his left hand, and few boxers, unless they have great skill are able to keep the big fighter from beating their face to tatters.

In courage Burns was always a bulldog; Johnson, it was said by some, had a "yellow streak." In none of his many battles, however, has it been proved that Johnson would not take a good beating. Neither Burns nor Johnson, however, have been considered men of the stamp of Jeffries, Sullivan or Corbett in the fighting game.

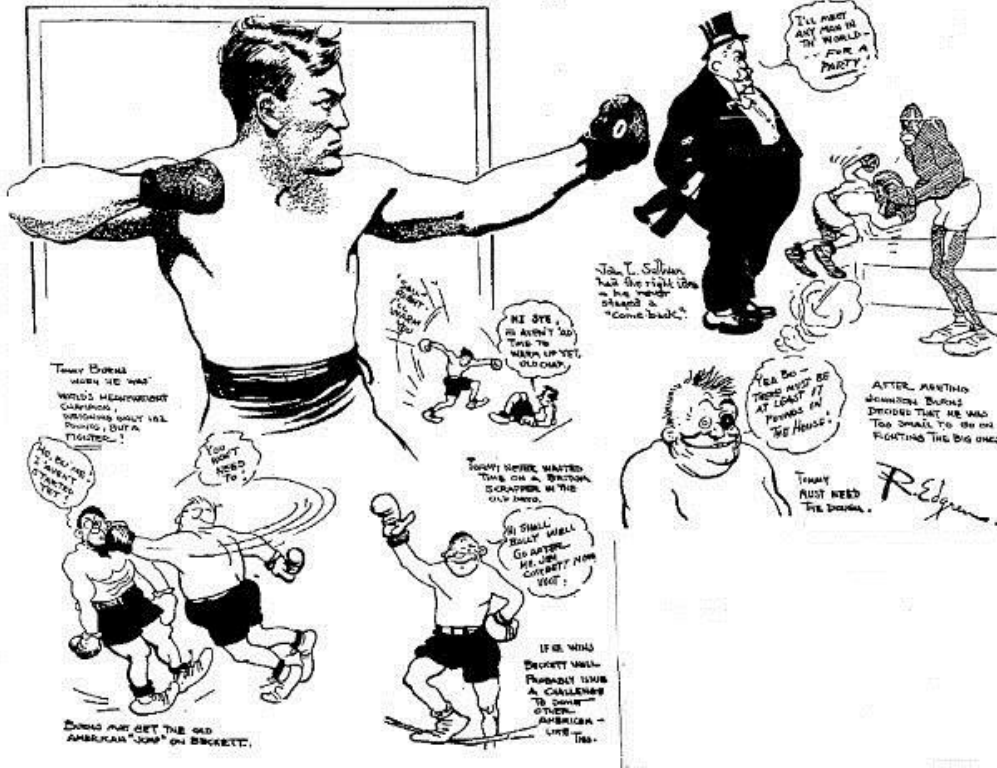
Had the Bout Been Held Here Johnson Would Have Been Favorite. Local sporting men last night expressed surprise that Burns should have been such a pronounced favorite over Johnson in the heavyweight fight at Sidney, N. S. W. Had the fight been held in the United States the betting conditions would have been reversed, as the negro a record was superior to that of Burns. It is probable that the advance advertising of Burns was responsible for the betting.

The best-informed followers of the sport were almost unanimous in their opinions that Johnson would win. Among those who predicted a victory for the colored fighter were James J. Jeffries, Bob Fitzsimmons, Tom Sharkey, Joe Gans, Battling Nelson, Sam Langford, George Considine, and other experts. The followers of Burns were in the minority, and even those who favored him to win were somewhat lukewarm in their support.

RESULT RECEIVED HERE.

New Yorkers Get the Decision at 9:45 Last Night. The result of the Burns-Johnson fight was known in New York at 9:45 o'clock last night, although the contest took place at Sidney, N. S. W., at 11 A. M. to-day according to Australian time. This apparent discrepancy is due to the difference of time, Sidney being 14 hours 35 minutes 15 seconds later than New York. The pair entered the ring for their 20-round bout at the schedule time of 11 o'clock. The men were fighting fourteen rounds before the police stopped the fight. As each round, counting the one minute rests, lasts four minutes the total time the men were fighting was fifty-six minutes. The result reached New York after passing over many cables and land wires in twenty-four minutes.

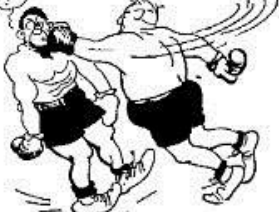
Tommy Burns Will Try To Come Back



Tommy Burns when he was world heavyweight champion, thinking only of money, but a fighter!

TO BE IN THE GREAT STREETS?

YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO



DOING ME GET THE OLD AMERICAN 'JOB' ON BECKETT.



Jim L. Sullivan has the right idea - he never chased a "come back."

HE'S GOT TO BE ABLE TO WALK UP YET, OLD MAN.



TOMMY NEVER WANTED THIS ON A BRITISH SCRAPPER IN THE OLD DAYS.

I SHALL BULLY WILL GO AFTER ME - THE CORNETT FROM YET!

IF HE WOULD BECKETT WILL PROBABLY TAKE A CHALLENGE TO CORNETT OTHER AMERICAN - LIVE IT.



I'LL MEET YOU IN THE WORLD - FOR A FIGHT!



YEA BO - THESE MUST BE AT LEAST 17 POUNDS IN THE HOUSE!

TOMMY MUST NEED THE DODGE.

AFTER ANOTHER JOURNALIST BUOKS DECIDE THAT HE WAS TOO SMALL TO GO ON FIGHTING THE BIG ONES

Redman