

King In The Cow Palace

Middleweight Champion Bobo Olson remained cool, calm and collected \$125,000 for 15 rounds of evening work against Challenger Castellani in San Francisco

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED - BY BUDD SCHULBERG

Originally Posted: August 30, 1954

SAN FRANCISCO

LIKE Roger Bannister, Attilio Castellani is a well-conditioned, pleasant mannered athlete nimble of foot and long on stamina. But unlike the 3:58.8 miler who runs forward, Castellani—the fist-fighter who challenged Bobo Olson for his middleweight championship of the world last Friday—runs backward.

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible to win a race—or a fight—by running backward, and for this reason Castellani ran a distinct second to Olson in their sporadically exciting contest in San Francisco's spacious Cow Palace.

The boys drew a crowd of 11,870 paying \$121,470 which sounds like a lot of people and a nice piece of change for a fight between two rather colorless performers, but Castellani's sponsor, Al Naiman of Cleveland, had guaranteed Olson and his cold-eyed manager, Sid Flaherty, \$125,000 to put the title on the line and he needed \$200,000 in the till plus the \$100,000 TV bundle to come out ahead. Fortunately Naiman is a millionaire construction man who took Castellani on as a hobby and set him up with a house and a life job a year ago. While his protégé was absorbing a systematic 15-round licking, Naiman was taking a financial beating to the tune of 50,000 bucks, if you call that music. To their credit the fighter and the construction magnate living a double life as a fight manager absorbed their punishment like gentlemen, reviewing the events of the evening calmly, almost cheerfully, and allowing as how they'd like to come back and do it all over again.

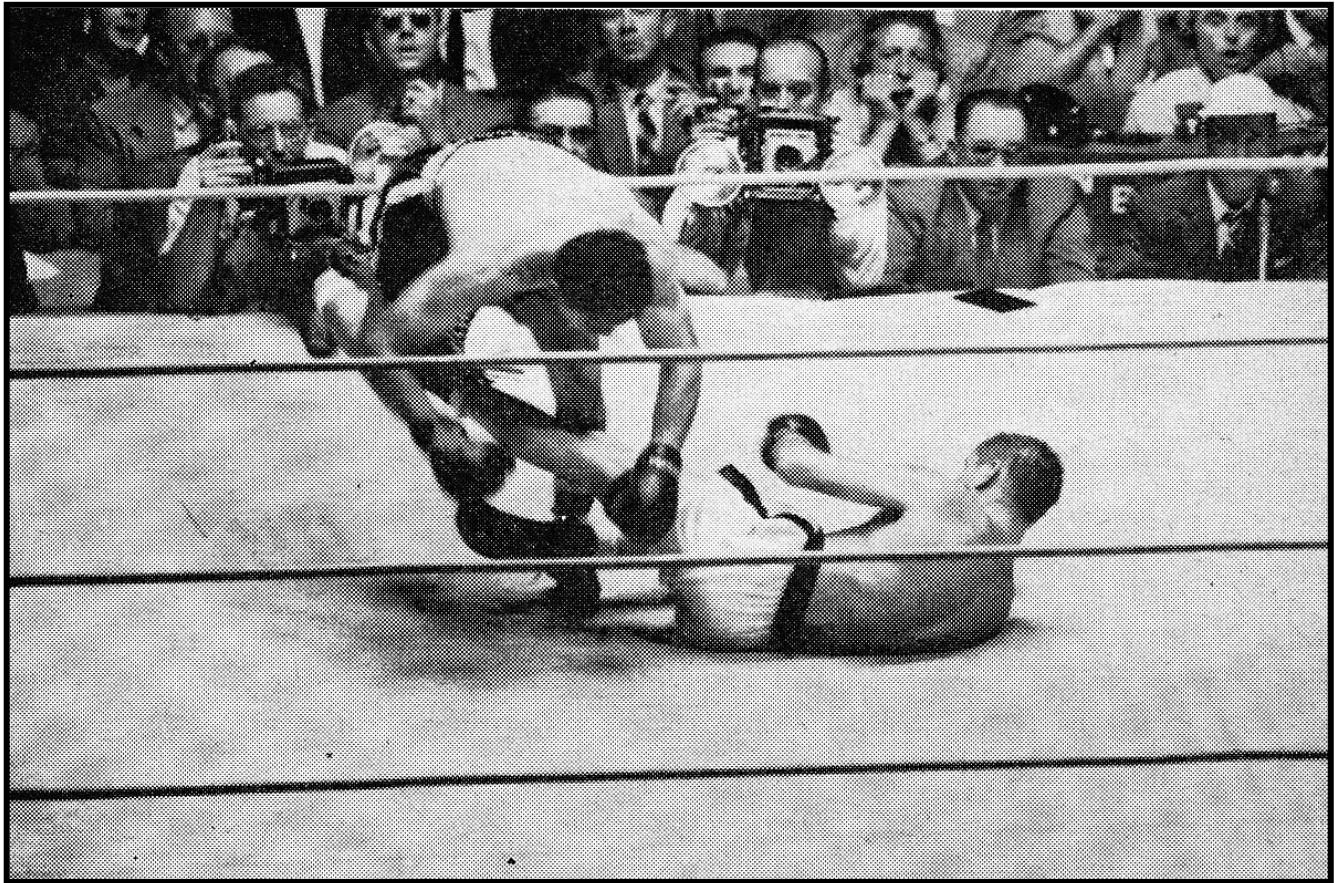
BUSINESSMAN BOBO

Olson hardly belongs in the same books with the champions who have made middleweight history from the original, "Nonpareil," Jack Dempsey, to Cerdan, but he

left little doubt in our minds that he is the master of such as Castellani and his reign over current middleweights remains secure. He is busy, crafty, businesslike, and even when he was losing an occasional round on points he gave the impression of being in charge. He is constantly moving forward on his slightly crooked, un-athletic-looking legs, often taking an ungainly little hop, almost a limp, in order to bring himself close enough to his adversary to score with his short, chopping punches that are nasty rather than lethal.

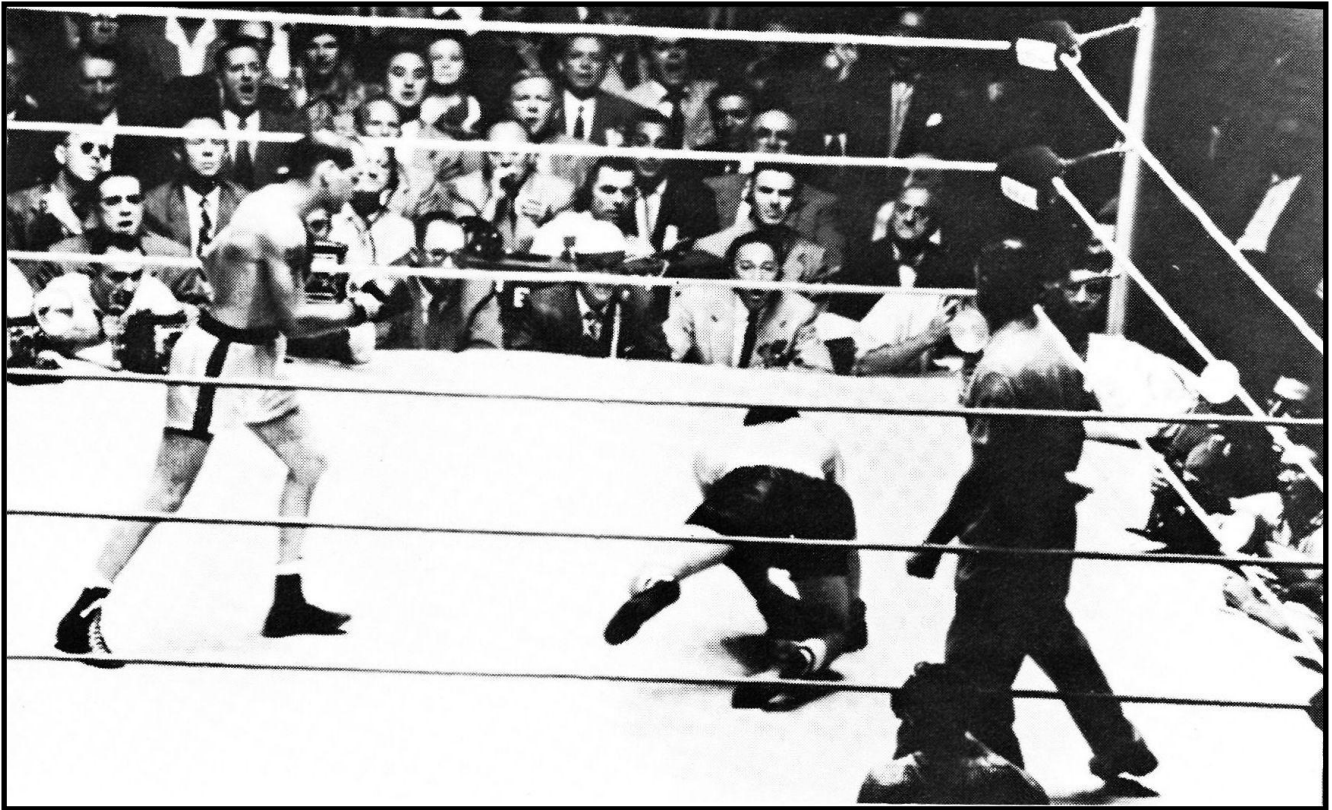
Tense and unsmiling, pale and red-nosed even before the fight, his is a forbidding and disconcerting visage as he moves steadily forward, his hands punching the air in a boxer's St. Vitus while he spars and feints and vamps for an opening. With the candor of an amateur, Castellani had admitted to some uncertainty as to whether he could take the measure of the unspectacularly clever champion and he clearly carried his doubts and hesitation into the ring with him, retreating at every opportunity and constantly looking toward his corner with apprehension. It wasn't fear that marred the challenger's performance so much as a deep-seated respect for the champion, something like that of a district manager resigned to the fact that no matter how hard he tries he will never be the equal of the regional superior. He can jab well and fire his right hand with authority and when he elects to lead and move forward he begins to look like the fighter his advance men have been claiming he is. But his chronic backpedaling and clinching give him away as a defensive and cautious boy.

Perhaps because he recognized his challenger's deficiencies, Olson was more aggressive than usual, setting a fast pace in the first round, chasing his slippery foe and punching with more abandon than is customary to his cagey, cat-and-mouse style. He seemed to be setting himself for harder punches and missing more than he did in his successful title defense against Gavilan. The pattern of the fight was clear, almost monotonously so after the first few rounds with Olson pressing and piling up points with short, mean hooks which Castellani did his deadly best to check by embracing Olson with more desperation than affection and cleaving to him like a three-armed lover until Referee Ray Flores belatedly pried them apart. The front seaters who had paid \$30 for the privilege didn't seem to mind, but the gallery gods, insisting on their five dollars' worth, expressed their feelings in the rude but traditional way, chiming in with Castellani's corner advisers to "Fight—go with him!" "Stick and throw the right!" "Lead!"



But there were moments of excitement, for Rocky would suddenly stand and fight, often when he was being cornered and crowded into the ropes and had to fight his way out in desperation. Then he would show the ability that seems to be imprisoned within his temperament, jabbing the champion off balance and cracking him in the head with a classic straight right hand. But it looked like another methodical Olson win until unexpectedly in the eleventh Castellani caught the champion with a right hook high on the side of the head. Bobo had one foot off the floor in an unclassical ballet position and his other leg was pretzeled around Castellani's. They both went down, Olson for an official knockdown, a three-count that excited the crowd and Nr. Naiman, who was on his feet begging his entry to "finish 'im off!"

But Bobo wasn't hurt so much as angry, and in the 12th round he hit Castellani on the jaw so hard that the challenger's nickname became an apt description of his backward course around the ring. He was reeling and staggering and hanging on like a storm-tossed sailor, as Olson hit him at will and seemed almost certain to knock him out. The rocked and nearly racked-up Rocky called on a reserve of strength and gameness he had been hiding from the spectators in the earlier rounds and fought back spiritedly. Near the end of the round, though, he was the old Rocky San Franciscan fans were



getting to know, grabbing and slipping away like some intimidated kid in a street fight trying to make a break for it and run for cover.

ELOQUENT JACK KEARNS

From there to the final bell it became obvious that Olson had been closer to losing his title to that brassy, 72-year-old veteran Jack Kearns—Castellani's drum beater and minister without portfolio—during the morning's weigh-in than at any time during the fight itself. Olson had slouched in for the ceremony a half-pound over the middleweight limit. He was allowed to retreat and have the offending eight ounces rubbed off. But Kearns—who never fails to take advantage of a break—protested eloquently throughout the whole period that there could be but one weigh-in time, that Olson was now a light-heavyweight and that the champion was already none other than Attilio ("Rocky") Castellani. But Doc lost the decision and so did Rocky.

At the end, the officials went through the formality of unanimous agreement: Olson, winner and still the champion, decisively. This corner's scoreboard showed 87-78 for Bobo, or 10 rounds to two, with three rounds even. A relatively easy night for the Scowl from Kalai.

After the fight Olson strolled away from the arena with Mrs. Olson on his arm, looking cool and collected (\$125,-000)—almost exactly like an unimpressive, ordinary citizen who has just wound up his work for the evening and is going out to have a bite with his wife before going home to see the kids and take it easy. Once the decision was announced, in fact, he even had a word for his opponent.

"Good fight," Olson said in an outburst of garrulousness when Castellani had come over to congratulate him on his victory. "I thought so too," Rocky responded politely. Later, soaking an injured left hand in a bucket of ice water and talking easily with reporters who sardined into the enlarged closet used as a dressing room, Castellani referred to the conversational exchange rather wistfully. "You know, I think that was the first time Olson ever talked to me," he said.

END