

Morgan vs. Tarleton: A Battle for the Ages

By Daniel Attias



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Australian prize rings have been graced by some great fighters since the dawn of the gloved era. Sadly, many of them have all but been damned to the annals of time and forgotten by most. One such fight occurred between American Tod Morgan and Englishman Nel Tarleton back in 1933 at the Sydney Stadium.

Morgan, a former junior lightweight world champion, had arrived in Australia in August of 1933 aboard the ship, the Niagara. He had fought in approximately 150 bouts prior to his Australian visit against some big names of the 1920s and '30s, names such as Babe Herman, Johnny Dundee, Joe Glick and Sammy Mandell. Morgan won the junior lightweight world title from Mike Ballerino in 1925 and defended it some 16 times before losing it to hall of famer Benny Bass in 1929.

Tarleton, a former British featherweight champion, arrived just two months prior to Morgan in June of 1933 aboard the Maloja. He had fought in about 100 professional bouts throughout the United Kingdom and America.

The build-up to the fight was an interesting one, both were obviously world-class fighters but without a home fighter appearing in the main event, there were doubts as to how many Australians would turn up to watch a "Yank" and a "Pom" go at it. Nine thousand fans did turn up and they witnessed one of the most amazing fights ever fought on Australian soil.

Styles make fights and these two possessed a style match-up that sure did make for good viewing. Morgan was a big puncher with enough knowledge and nous to be considered a boxer-puncher whereas Tarleton was a pure boxer, a man of science in the ring.

The opening round of the scheduled 15-round bout began with the bigger man, Morgan, throwing all manner of punches, while Tarleton backpedaled and used his quick jab and feints to good effect.

Morgan got on the inside where he threw his left hook often and banged away at the ribs with his right. Tarleton was good enough to block most of the blows but Morgan did get one big left hook through the defense of the Englishman and it landed flush on his chin; he crumpled to the floor taking nine seconds to regain his feet.

The crowd was shocked by the viciousness of the blow and Tarleton fought the remainder of the round on the back foot making it to the bell and a much needed respite.

The second stanza began with Morgan out to try and end it but the slick boxing of Nel dazzled the crowd as he slipped punches with relative ease and his left jab flicked out with regularity.

Tarleton really took to delighting the crowd in the third as he rammed home a jab in the face of Morgan when he had rushed him, then stepped clear of the incoming counterpunches before landing a left hook to the face, then the body, and a right hand that landed under the heart.

The crowd rose, sensing the fight was really about to begin and the American didn't disappoint with his retort. Morgan attacked with renewed vigor throwing both lefts and rights pushing Tarleton to the ropes but Tarleton avoided many of the bigger blows thanks to his defensive prowess.

Tarleton had taken the second and third rounds with a display of 'sweet science' that mesmerized the fans and he would continue this beautiful display throughout the majority of the next round before Morgan's rushing style paid off as he again dropped Tarleton after landing a left hook to the body followed by a left to the jaw.

Morgan, once again, had gained the upper hand and it would continue through the fifth round as he threw everything at the Englishman—who was less than surefooted by this stage—but he survived the fifth without going down.

The sixth round completely turned for Tarleton as he emerged from the corner with newfound vitality. His speed was back and he darted in and out, landing quick jabs, spinning Morgan in the clinches and banging away at the body while making Morgan look like a second-rate fighter.

As it does when a fight captures the imagination of all that witness it, the momentum turned again in the seventh as Morgan dropped back to a left hook attack and for the third time in the fight, dropped the smaller man.

Tarleton beat the count and when the action resumed Morgan showed his full fury as he launched numerous attacks, but the Englishman kept his chin tucked tightly to his chest and made it to the bell.

The fight had been a seesawing affair thus far, with Tarleton outboxing Morgan for periods of the fight whilst the American was showing how dangerous his punches could be by putting Nel on the canvas three times.

Despite the knockdowns, Tarleton started the eighth as fresh as he had the first and once again his artistry in the ring was brought forth. He danced around the ring, blocking Morgan's punches and countering with lightning quick hooks and jabs.

The next three rounds were some of the slickest boxing ever witnessed in Australia as Tarleton ducked, weaved and danced around Morgan like he was a mere novice. Many of the newspapermen that sat ringside that night were speechless.

The thirteenth saw Morgan rally back and slightly edge the round landing hooks to the body and the final round was filled with toe-to-toe action which had the 9000 strong crowd on its feet.

The referee, Joe Wallis, called the fight a draw but the crowd was seemingly uninterested in the actual result of the fight. A truly magnificent bout was enough for all and sundry to walk away content.

Both men were of the opinion they had done enough to deserve the win but each was also full of praise for their opponent.

"It was a great fight and I thought I just won," said Tarleton, "but what a shock I got when Morgan first put me on the floor with a left hook. I thought the roof had fallen in. I was right after the seventh and afterwards never in danger. Tod must have been a great boxer at his top."

Morgan said, "That English boy is the slickest fighter I have ever met anywhere in my long career in the ring. He doesn't slap, his speed is phenomenal, and he's the hardest thing to hit with a punch. I don't know how he got over the three knockdowns. He's certainly game. I guess those knockdowns should have earned me the decision."

(Special thanks to Australian Boxing Legends magazine.)

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