

EDWARD "BEARCAT" WRIGHT

By Tim Leone

Edward "Bearcat" Wright was born on December 18, 1897 in Galveston, TX. His family moved to Arizona shortly thereafter and it was there that he started his professional career in 1919.

He enlisted in the Navy and continued fighting occasionally primarily in Cuba. After his discharge in 1920, he moved to Omaha, NE., for reasons unknown, and used that as his base of operations until the early 1970's.

Moving to San Antonio, he lived out his life there with his second wife, living off a small Navy pension and retirement income derived from the Armor Packing Co. where he worked after his boxing career was over. The "Old Bearcat" died on July 6, 1975 and was buried in San Antonio, TX.

Standing 6'1" and weighing 205 to 230, Wright was described as "bone hard" with massive shoulders and arms presenting an awesome figure to his opponents. His style of fighting didn't help matters either. Wrapping his arms around his body in sort of a crab shell (like Archie Moore's defence); he fought out of a low crouch, weaving from side to side while looking out over his arms and allowing punches to bounce off the top of his head, shoulders and arms. He bore in, throwing looping lefts and rights to the body. After he got close enough, a right uppercut to the body or head was his best punch (a body shot stopped Jack Johnson).

Wright's career, at the very best, should be described as highly irregular. He would go through periods where he would be very destructive, while on other occasions, he seemed to suffer from a severe lack of interest.

For example, prior to his match with Tut Jackson on November 25, 1925, he went on a tear with his sparring partner. Two days before the match, he took on three local heavyweights in the same afternoon, announcing he would pay \$100 to any or all which

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lasted one round. The local press described what happened as "almost frightening". A "bone crushing left", a "terrible right", and finally an "earth shattering uppercut" rendered all three unconscious in less than one minute each. Dire predication for Jackson proceeded the match. The fight itself, which Wright won on a decision, was described as rather dull with Wright not throwing any serious punches. On other occasions during his career, he ran off streaks of 8, 12, and 13 knockouts in a row.

Without a doubt, Bearcat went into the tank, once for sure, once maybe, and on another occasion may have not tried very hard. His match with Primo Carnera was no doubt a "tank job". The local press, before the match, went to great lengths to report that everything was going to be on the up and up. Interviews with Wright gave assurance that a "true effort would be put forth". Carnera's spokesman assured everyone that there would not be any question concerning Wright's performance as there had been in Carnera's match with George Godfrey.

After three spirited rounds in which Wright gave a "respectable showing", he was knocked cold with a "smash to the jaw which cooled him for 10 minutes. Wright took part of the ring with him when he went through the ropes." Who's kidding who? Even Sam Langford didn't reek that much damage, and Carnera couldn't hold a candle to Langford when it came to punching.

The Battling Monroe match in 1923 had a strange odor to it. Wright was stopped in one round by the newcomer, Battling Monroe, who was being highly praised as a star of the future. His purse was held by the local commission with the strong suspicion that he took a dive or was drugged. Wright came out in his shell and didn't throw a punch the whole fight. Every swing thrown by Monroe staggered Wright until he collapsed after only 1 1/2 minutes of the first round. It's interesting to note that both Monroe and Wright were both fighting out of Omaha at the time and were both managed by Jack Lewis. Lewis, for his part, would have to be put above consideration for any wrong doing, since he was a very straight person.

Wright's match with Micky Walker presents an entirely different scenario. It seems that the "Toy Bulldog" had been out partying quite heavily the night before and entered the ring rather hungover.

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In the first minute of the first round, Walker ran into a mighty right thrown by Wright, and hit the floor as if shot. "Doc" Kerns, Walker's manager, then jumped to his feet yelling first at Walker, "Get up, get up", and then began yelling at Wright about being an "uppity nigger" and "what's the matter with you, boy, don't you know what your place is".

Somehow Micky managed to pull himself up before the count and began staggering around the ring like a drunken sailor. Bearcat did not attempt to press his advantage and fought very defensively the remainder of the 10 rounds, with Walker gaining the decision.

Question: Did Kerns, admittedly one of the better boxing minds ever, execute a very clever move by brow-beating Bearcat psychologically into a conditioned response taken by many black fighters of that era, or was he reminding Wright of an agreement that was not being kept?

For the rest of his life, Wright never spoke about these three matches, not even to close friends. He did, however, speak of other opponents.

Wright's match with Jack Dempsey deserves special comments. Taking place on November 11, 1931, it was a legitimate four round main event bout sanctioned by the Nebraska Boxing Commission in which an official outcome would be rendered. This was not just an exhibition as listed by many but a full blown fight.

Dempsey was coming off a long barn storming stand, fighting himself into condition for a comeback attempt. Hailed in the pre-fight press as the great champion he was, Wright presented a seemingly easy foe.

After the four rounds were over, Dempsey was given an unanimous decision. The crowd and all the press totally disagreed and a near riot took place with Dempsey being booed from the ring, while Wright was given a standing ovation when he left.

At various times long after his career was over Bearcat would tell reporters, who he didn't personally know, that Dempsey was the greatest fighter he ever fought and the best of the five champions he faced. To press members he had a long standing relationship with and to friends and family, he told of his true feelings. "Dempsey was old and his legs were gone. He could still punch but couldn't move. The greatest fighter I

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ever fought was Sam Langford. The record may say we fought three times, but I'm telling you it was five times, and I finally got to him in Mexico. Every time he hit you, it hurt. Lord how that man could punch."

Wright had little to say about his fight with Jack Johnson except that Johnson was old when they fought and he was young. When he fought Max Bear the opposite was true.

He did like to talk about his match with Willie Henry in Galveston. To this day, sports writers still refer to that match as the greatest fight ever to take place in that city. After being knocked down twice in the first round, he came back to score a stunning KO in the third stanza.

Both the Omaha and Galveston press liked to relate to the circumstances around his knockout of Tut Jackson in 1926. After going down for the count in the seventh round of the match in Omaha, Jackson began harassing the referee about a "short count". Things began to get out of hand when Tut began to beat on the much smaller referee. Wright, who was a long time friend of the official being they both lived in Omaha, had already left the ring and was in the dressing room. Upon hearing the rhubarb which was going on, Wright returned to the ring, gloves off but hands still taped, pulled Jackson off his friend and knocked him cold with one punch. He then turned to the referee and said, "Count again, he ain't gonna get up" and walked out of the ring. It should also be noted that this was also the last time he and Jackson ever fought.

When everything was said and done Edward "Bearcat" Wright, the "Good Old Cat", applied himself to his trade with a professional pride which was much to his credit. When he and his manager decided to end their partnership, which was sealed only with a hand shake, Wright gave his entire purse to his friend after their last "event". He was never great copy for the press, but he did periodically challenge the top five black heavyweights to fight him on successive nights, winner take all. To be sure this was only PR, but it's interesting to note that he only challenged black fighters, he seemed to have no real interest or drive to push for the national spotlight but seemed content to let his career float along as it would.

Like most old fighters, he lamented about the pay he received compared to that of modern fighters. Often his purses were no more than \$50. On other occasions, he received as little as \$10 or \$11 for fighting a main event.

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In his latter years, he devoted his time to helping his son, Bearcat Wright, Jr., first in an ill-fated boxing career which didn't go very far and later in a much more successful pro-wrestling outing.

More than likely Wright had between 70 to 100 additional matches than these listed in the R. R. B. Enclosed is as accurate of a record for his early years as I have been able to come up with.

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BEARCAT WRIGHT

Born Galveston, Texas - December 18, 1897. Died
 San Antonio, Texas - July 6, 1975. Weight 210 lbs.
 Height 6 ft. 1 in. Managed by Jack Lewis.

1919

--Bob McHavin, Cuba KO 4
 --Bishop, Bregg, Cuba KO 2
 --Whirlwind Langford, Cuba KO 3
 --Mulatto Phillips, Cuba KO 8

1920

--Jack Thompson, Omaha W 10
 --Tim O'Leary, Omaha W 10
 --Jim Wetherson, Omaha W 10
 Aug. 24--Young Peter Jackson, Omaha KO 5
 Aug. 30--Sam Langford, Walthill L 10

1921

May 20--Jack Thompson, Omaha D 10
 July 20--Sam Langford, Omaha KO by 9
 Aug. 12--Jack Taylor, Omaha W 10
 Oct. 7--Ben Miller, York, NE LF 6
 Nov. 10--Jim Hayler, Walthill D 10
 Dec. 17--Jack Taylor, Omaha D 10

1922

June 19--Sam Langford, Galveston D 12
 July 17--Sam Langford, Tulsa KO by 5
 --George Godfrey W 10

1923

July --Porky Flynn KO 4
 July --Al Norton KO 3
 Aug. --Sam Langford, Mexico City KO 9
 Sept. 2--Battling Monroe, Nebraska City . KO by 1

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1924

--Joe Lohman W 10
 --Farmer Lodge KO 6

1925

--Lee Anderson W 10
 --Fred Fulton KO 5 ?
 --Kid Norfolk D 10
 --Lee Anderson D 10
 Aug. --Farmer Lodge, NE KO 5
 Aug. 27--Topeka Jack Johnson, Topeka KO 2
 Aug. 28--Young Sam Langford, Topeka KO 2
 Nov. 25--Tut Jackson, Topeka W 10
 Dec. 11--Farmer Lodge, Minneapolis, MN KO 3
 Dec. 17--Tut Jackson, Topeka D 10
 Dec. --George Bourland, Des Moines L 10

(8 straight KO's prior to Jackson's
 match Topeka Capital Nov. 24, 1925

1926

--Battling Kid Norfolk W 10
 --Earl Black KO 2
 Mar. 17--Tut Jackson, Wichita KO 5
 Mar. 25--George, Bourland, Omaha KO 1
 April 12--Brad Simmons, Topeka KO 7
 April 24--William Banks, Souix City KO 2
 April 30--George Bourland, Des Moines KO 4
 June --Ace Clark, Galveston W 12
 Aug. 2--Tut Jackson, Cedar Rapids KO 7
 Aug. 23--George Gilmore, Cedar Rapids W 10
 Sept. --Tut Jackson, Omaha KO 7
 Oct. 5--Tiny Herman, Portland W 10
 Nov. 3--Joe Lohman, Des Moines L 10
 Nov. 12--Duke Horn, MN W 8
 Nov. 22--George Godfrey, Portland NC 10
 Dec. 15--Ed Dalton, Denver KO 2
 Dec. 22--Mike Arnold, Denver W 4

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1927

Jan.	--Bill Hartwell, K.C.	D	10
	--Chief John Metoquah, Cedar Rapids .	L	10
	--Brad Simmons, Galveston	W	10
April	11--Bill Goethe, Galveston	KO	3
May	4--Neil Clisby, Lincoln, NE	KO	5
May	16--Willie Henry, Galveston	KO	3
June	7--Duke Horn, MN	W	10
June	28--Chuck Wiggins, San Antonio	L	10
July	14--Earl Blue, Minneapolis, MN	KO	2
Aug.	5--Chief John Metoquah, Cedar Rapids .	W	10
Sept.	7--Joe Lohman, Des Moines	W	10
Oct.	3--Jack Baptist, Cedar Rapids	KO	2
Oct.	17--Bob Lawson, Galveston	W	12
Oct.	28--Chuck Wiggins, Omaha	W	10
Nov.	4--Big Bill Tate, Cedar Rapids	W	10
Nov.	--Bill Hartwell, K.C.	D	12
Nov.	25--Big Boy Peterson, MN	D	10
Dec.	5--Bill Hartwell, Galveston	D	12

1928

Jan.	--Bill Hartwell, Galveston	W	10
Feb.	6--Bob Lawson, Galveston	L	12
March	2--Bill Hartwell, K.C.	L	10
March	8--Dave Thornton, Topeka	W	10
April	16--Jack Johnson, Topeka	KO	5
June	8--Roy Clark, Galveston	W	12
July	23--Eric Johnson, Omaha	KO	1
Sept.	7--Johnny Risko, Omaha	L	10
Sept.	17--Bill Owens, K.C.	D	10
Nov.	2--Bill Owens, Omaha	D	10
Dec.	3--Neil Clisby, Galveston	D	12
Dec.	14--Long Tom Hawkins, San Diego	W	10

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1929

Jan.	11--	Jack Beasley, San Diego	KO	2
Jan.	25--	Tom Hawkins, San Diego	L	10
Feb.	8--	Mack House, San Diego	KO	6
April	19--	Tom Hawkins, San Diego	.....	D	10
Aug.	--	Happy Shade	.....	KO	1
Sept.	--	Seal Harris	.....	W	10
Sept.	16--	Al Walker, Topeka	.....	W	10
Oct.	18--	Leon Chevalier, San Francisco	.....	KO	6
Oct.	25--	Tom Hawkins, San Francisco	.....	KO	9
Nov.	12--	Bill Owens, Des Moines	.....	KO	2
Nov.	25--	Tom Sayers, Omaha	.....	KO	2
Dec.	6--	Pedro Lopez, Cedar Rapids	.....	KO	1

Unlisted Matches (Prior to Sept. 17, 1929)

--	Cecil (Seal) Harris	.....	L	10
--	Jack Warren	.....	L	10
--	Wildcat Harris, Omaha	.....	KO	2
--	Neil Clisby	.....	W	10
--	Dave Thronton	.....	D	10
--	Dave Thronton	.....	D	10