

Jack Carroll's Golden Run

By Daniel Attias



Thirty thousand people watched Jack Carroll's boxing master class against Izzy Jannazzo.

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The date was February 29, 1932, the city of Sydney was abuzz over the planned opening of the famed Sydney Harbour Bridge and two of Australia's finest fighters were set to face off in the Harbour City.

The stage was the Sydney Stadium as Australian welterweight champion Jack Carroll faced off with Fred Henneberry, middleweight contender who had just four months earlier lost a close decision to Ambrose Palmer for the Australian middleweight title.

The fight began as many had expected with Henneberry the aggressor and Carroll the elusive and crafty boxer evading the bigger man's attempts to harm him. The pace was fast and Carroll was proving to be the superior boxer throughout the fight winning at least 10 of the first 12 rounds but Henneberry the bigger man would wear down Carroll and stop him in the 13th round.

For Carroll, this would be the last time he ever lost a professional fight, and it was the beginning of a six-year run unlike any in Australian boxing history.

Carroll's career was always a case of 'what could have been.' He was a notoriously bad traveler and wasn't the most ambitious of fighters. Had he been willing to travel to America in the late 1930s he would surely have been given a shot at the world welterweight title.

After the knockout loss to Henneberry—who would go on to beat Palmer for the Australian middleweight title just three weeks later—Carroll would fight 31 more times over the next six years, without a loss.

He rematched Henneberry on the 20th of August 1932 at the West Melbourne Stadium and delighted the crowd with an overwhelming performance and a points decision win. Sydney newspaper, the Referee summed up Carroll's sublime performance.

"We witnessed on Saturday night the spectacle of a hard-hitting fighter (Henneberry) rather crude in his methods, opposed to a master of ringcraft. A man whose defence was splendid, and whose stabbing lefts flicked in through his opponent's smother like a tongue of flame through a crevice in a wall. It was Carroll at his best."

A third bout was fought between the pair in September of 1933 with Carroll proving once and for all he was the superior boxer with another points victory.

After his wins over Henneberry, Carroll's stock rose significantly and there was a steady stream of quality locals and world class foreigners lining up to fight the 'Red Fox,' as Carroll was often referred to as.

Former junior lightweight world champion, Tod Morgan, who was now fighting as a welterweight, lined up against Carroll twice and lost both bouts. Carroll was too big, too strong and was almost unhittable against the former champion.

Hall of fame lightweight Wesley Ramey was another smaller man who was willing to fight Carroll but the size disparity was too much for the great from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the bout was stopped in the 10th round. Ramey was stopped just four times in 194 career bouts.

Ron Richards, Willard Brown, Jack Portney, the big names kept coming but they all failed to beat Carroll during his golden run.

His real success however, came when visiting Dutchman Bep van Klaveren arrived. Van Klaveren was ranked number two contender in the world to Barney Ross' world title at the time and the fight between Carroll and van Klaveren was a much talked about event.

Noted boxing scribe Jim Donald called the bout the most important on these shores since Tommy Burns and Jack Johnson fought for the world heavyweight title back in 1908.

"The stage is set at the Sydney Sports Ground for the most important programme of boxing entertainment since the Burns-Johnson world championship fight. A brand new flood lighting system will illuminate the ring, and every patron, from the highest to the lowest price seat, is guaranteed a full and clear view of happenings in the magic square."

Twenty five thousand people turned up in pouring rain on Boxing Day in 1935 to witness Carroll thoroughly outclass van Klaveren in the bout. Soon after, American boxing magazine The Ring ranked Carroll third in the welterweight world rankings and The Sydney Morning Herald called the fight "the greatest display of Jack Carroll's career."

A rematch followed for van Klaveren, this time in much dryer conditions, which suited the visitor, but Carroll once again took apart the highly rated van Klaveren in front of 20,000 people. So one sided was the fight that referee Harold Baker enquired as to

whether van Klaveren would like to continue on after the 13th round, the tough Hollander chose to continue but he was outpointed losing every round of the fight.

Between their two bouts van Klaveren attempted to flee Australia on the American liner, the Mariposa, claiming he had been unfairly treated during his stay, but most claim the real reason was that he wanted to avoid another licking at the hands of Carroll.

There was plenty of talk of a world title shot for Carroll in the months following the win. His manager Charlie Lucas arranged a bout against Barney Ross in Australia for the title but it fell through over issues of money.

He fought visiting American welterweight Jimmy Leto in March of 1937. Leto had a record of 90 wins and only nine losses at the time, but Carroll was given the decision in a close fight. By this stage The Ring had Carroll ranked as the number one contender to the title.

New York welter Izzy Jannazzo, who later fought Sugar Ray Robinson on numerous occasions and had lost a welterweight title fight to Barney Ross just one year earlier, was the next big name on Carroll's resume as a record 30,000 people showed up to once again witness Carroll put on a boxing master class. The Sydney Morning Herald proclaimed, yet again, that it was Carroll's greatest ever performance.

"The contest was scientific and willing, with Carroll showing power, skill, and fighting tenacity such as he has seldom, if ever, surpassed in his long and successful career in the ring. It was Carroll's greatest performance."

Two more wins over Leto rounded out Carroll's career. He was having trouble making the welterweight limit by this stage and was reticent to travel overseas in search of a title fight. Carroll, the old 'Red Fox' sure did have a run of glory back in the 1930s.

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