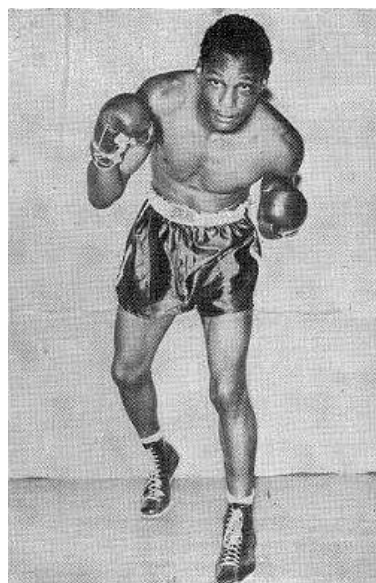


# Leonard Morrow: The Fighter Who Derailed Archie Moore's First World Title Opportunity

By Dan Cuoco

On June 2, 1948, Leonard Morrow scored a stunning knockout of Archie Moore in the first round despite having only 15 professional fights. This unexpected victory disrupted a highly anticipated title match between Moore and light heavyweight champion Gus Lesnevich. Morrow entered the fight with a record of 12 wins, two losses, and one draw (including 6 KOs) and was considered to be outmatched by the seasoned veteran Moore. At that time, Moore had an impressive record of 92 wins, 14 losses, and 7 draws (with one no-contest), including 69 KOs, and he held the California State light heavyweight title.

During Morrow's eight-year career from 1946 to 1954, *Ring* magazine recognized him as a light heavyweight contender for 28 months, specifically from August 1948 to February 1951. In 1948, he was ranked as the number two contender for Freddie Mills' light heavyweight world title.



## Amateur career

Morrow started his boxing career under the guidance of former two-time welterweight champion Young Jack Thompson. He trained with Thompson until the latter's untimely death from a heart attack on April 11, 1946, at the age of 41. After Thompson's passing, Morrow competed in his final five amateur bouts, winning four of them by knockout and losing one due to a controversial decision.

## Professional career

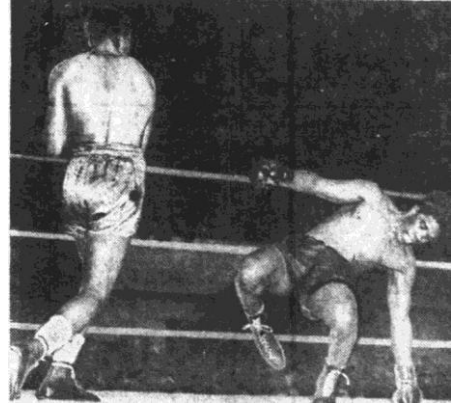
Morrow made his professional boxing debut on October 30, 1946, at the Auditorium in Oakland, California, where he won by a 4-round decision against 38-fight veteran Allen Arnett. His next two bouts were against 26-fight veteran Gil Mojica in March 1947. Morrow lost the first match on March 5th after six rounds, and then he faced Mojica again two weeks later, this time in a scheduled 4-round fight. Morrow was knocked down early in the second round by a right to the chin and was getting hit repeatedly along the ropes when Referee Jack Silver intervened to stop the fight.

Jimmy Murray, the matchmaker, faced criticism for his decision to match Morrow with Allen Arnett and Gil Mojica as his initial opponents, mainly due to their greater experience. However, Murray felt vindicated when Morrow remained undefeated in his next 12 fights from April 23, 1947, to September 1, 1948, which included one draw against Dee Edwards.

During his unbeaten streak, Morrow faced former amateur sensation Jack Green, defeating him by knockout in the first round. He also fought Gil Mojica twice, successfully avenging his earlier losses with a points victory after six rounds and a technical knockout in the fourth round. Additionally, he won against Allen Arnett again, stopped veteran Paulie Peters by technical knockout in the sixth round, and won a controversial ten-round split decision against Bert Lytell.

## Bert Lytell

On February 11, 1948, Morrow faced Lytell at the Oakland Auditorium. Morrow entered the ring with an 11-pound weight advantage and started strong, winning the first six rounds with effective boxing and powerful punches. However, after being knocked down twice in the sixth round, Lytell found his rhythm and began to take control as Morrow started to tire.



*Morrow Drops Lytell in the sixth*

The first knockdown seemed more like a slip; Morrow threw a punch just as Lytell lost his balance, but no count was initiated. Later, Morrow pushed Lytell while simultaneously landing a punch. Although Lytell wasn't hurt, the count reached two before he could regain his feet. Frustrated by these knockdowns, Lytell took complete charge of the fight from that point onward, soundly pummeling an exhausted Morrow.

Despite Lytell's strong finish, only one judge scored the fight in his favor, though the crowd also began to show support for Lytell. With a gate attendance of \$6,126, Morrow was declared the winner, surprising many, including Commissioner Dave Stevenson, who believed Lytell deserved the victory. Lytell's manager, Sammy Aaronson, sought to reverse the decision, but the outcome remained unchanged. Even if Morrow had officially lost the decision, he would have won the respect of those in attendance who initially gave him little chance against the experienced southpaw.

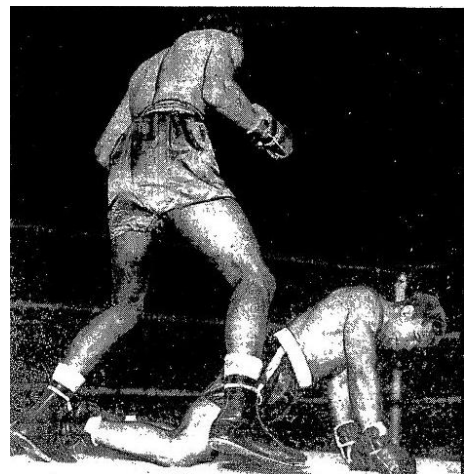
## Morrow Upsets Archie Moore for the California State Light Heavyweight Title

Leonard Morrow's fight against Archie Moore would become the defining moment of his boxing career. This bout marked Moore's first title defense after he had won the vacant title by defeating Bobby Zander the previous year, while Morrow was participating in only his fourth main event. With little more than a year of pro-competition, Morrow gained much of his athletic fame at McClymond's High School in Oakland, and a large delegation from the school was on hand to give him vocal support.

San Francisco's Eddie Muller wrote, *"If Leonard Morrow upsets the form chart boys and beats Archie Moore in Oakland tomorrow night, he will be the first fighter to win a state crown with so little experience. This will be his fourteenth fight."*

The match, scheduled for 12 rounds, occurred on June 2, 1948. Leonard Morrow surprised everyone by knocking Moore down three times in the first round despite taking a few clean jabs himself. Morrow won the fight just two minutes and fifty-one seconds into the opening round.

After about a minute had passed in the round, with Moore initially outboxing Morrow, Morrow landed a short left hook followed by a right cross that sent Moore to the canvas for a seven-count. Moore then faced a flurry of head punches that knocked him down again. Once again, he heard Referee Frankie Brown count to nine before



*Morrow Stands Over Moore*

rising. This time, Moore charged back at Morrow, throwing a left and a right to the midsection. Morrow kept his composure and delivered a powerful right that knocked Moore down in the center of the ring, where he was counted out. This unexpected defeat ended a highly anticipated title match between Moore and light heavyweight champion Gus Lesnevich. After defeating Archie Moore, *Ring* magazine elevated him as their number two world light heavyweight contender.

### **Fitzie Fitzpatrick**

In early July 1948, Jimmy Murray expressed his frustration at being unable to find suitable opponents for his new star. He noted that Bert Lytell had exhausted his competition in California and was scheduled to face Oakland Billy Smith in Cincinnati on July 12. To fill this gap, Murray arranged a match for Morrow against Fitzie Fitzpatrick in Los Angeles on July 13, followed by a rematch with Archie Moore in Baltimore on July 26.

On July 13, 1948, Morrow captivated a crowd of 5,000 fans at the Olympic Auditorium when he overcame a nine-count knockdown in the second round to knock out Fitzie Fitzpatrick in the fifth round. The fight was a thrilling spectacle while it lasted. Fitzpatrick, a 1-3 underdog, took an early lead by landing a powerful right hand that drove Morrow into the ropes in the first round. In the next round, Fitzie delivered a heavy right hand that sent Morrow sliding against the ropes and down to the floor. Morrow got up at nine and fought back just as the bell rang. Despite having a swollen left eye, Morrow regained his rhythm in the third round, landing strong right hands on Fitzie that knocked him down for a count of two and then five, followed by sharp left hands to the head. (*Pic Morrow drops Fitzpatrick*)



In the fourth round, powerful rights knocked Fitzpatrick down twice, first for six seconds and then for nine. Although clearly dazed after the second knockdown, he fought instinctually and managed to daze Morrow with a series of punches just before the bell. Morrow finished Fitzpatrick in the fifth round with a right to the chin, knocking him down for the full count.

Morrow's rematch with Archie Moore, set for August 26, was canceled due to a back injury from his fight with Fitzpatrick. Doctor Samuel H. Goldman confirmed the injury was related to that match.

On August 17, 1948, Morrow and Fitzpatrick were set to fight again, but the rematch was disappointing. Morrow won in just two rounds, dropping Fitzpatrick twice in the first round with left hooks to the stomach. In the second round, he delivered a right hook to the jaw, followed by a left to the stomach, knocking Fitzpatrick down. Fitzpatrick crawled along the ring's edge but was counted out by referee Reggie Gilmore.

### **Bob Foxworth Ends Morrow's Rapid Ascent to the Top**

On September 1, 1948, Morrow's rapid rise within the division ended dramatically when he faced Bob Foxworth at the Oakland Auditorium.

Foxworth scored a technical knockout just 32 seconds into the fourth round in what was one of the most brutal fights ever staged in the Bay Area.

Referee Johnny Lotsey ultimately stopped the fight after Morrow staggered to his feet following a knockdown. The fight should have been halted at the end of the third round, but Morrow was forced to take even more punishment in the fourth. This decision came too late to the ringside spectators who had been urging Lotsey to stop the bout due to the severe punishment that Morrow was enduring.

Alan Ward, the Sports Editor of the Oakland Tribune, covered the fight and reported from ringside.

*“Few fighters under my observation have taken a more savage beating than Morrow absorbed in the third. An eye partially closed in the first round, but pried open during the rest period, was tightly shut by one of Foxworth’s lethal right hands. Another right to the point two inches lower caused Leonard’s face to swell to sickening proportions. Then the execution started.*

*While San Francisco’s gift to refereeing, Johnny Lotsey, calmly skipped around the ring, casting barely a glance in the direction of the battered, reeling Morrow, Foxworth really did a job on that closed eye and muffin shaped face.*

*The fans screamed to Lotsey to stop it. More than one ringsider winced when, with monotonous regularity, the broad-shouldered Foxworth landed his punches.*

*A right to the eye, a right to the jaw, a right to the eye.... Morrow couldn’t get away from the punches. Not until the Oaklander was stretched across the middle strand, then slid to his knees to take an eight count, did the imperturbable Lotsey halt his measured stroll around the ring. Lotsey stopped to deliver the count. That’s part of the referee’s job, you know”*

After the fight, Dr. C.E. Burton, the house physician, gave Morrow a complete examination and recommended that he refrain from fighting for a while, stating, *“This boy needs rest; he needs time for his injuries to heal.”*

The next day, Alan Ward wrote: *“Today, Morrow, who has more courage than is perhaps wise, is scheduled to visit two doctors. One will examine his left eye to assess the extent of the injury he sustained last evening. The other will thoroughly inspect Leonard’s jaw, possibly taking X-rays to determine if there is a fracture in the bone.”*

*“Morrow, despite the challenging assurances of Manager All Faulkner that Morrow wasn’t badly hurt, merely bruised, may never be the same after last night’s fight. I’m not trying to be an alarmist, but in many years of covering prizefights, I’ve seen a prospectively good pug ruined in one single fight. In a single round, three minutes of last night’s main event. Few fighters under my observation have taken a more savage beating than Morrow absorbed in the third.”*

Ironically, a detached retina that Foxworth suffered ended his short but remarkable career prematurely after the victory.

### **Morrow Returns to the Ring after Six-Month Layoff**

In early March 1949, matchmaker Jimmy Murray announced that Morrow, who had been sidelined for six months due to a fractured cheekbone, would be making a comeback. On March 23, 1949, Ray Schwartz,



**Bob Foxworth**

a sports reporter for the Oakland Post-Inquirer, wrote about Morrow's comeback fight against heavyweight John Donnelly that evening.

*“Morrow's layoff can be blamed both on Morrow's foolishness and some rash matchmaking by Jimmy Murray. His troubles started when Morrow sustained a left cheek bruise against Fitz Fitzpatrick. He refused to submit to X-rays, unaware that the cheekbone was cracked. The story gets a little more complex, so stand by. Murray wanted a soft but well-known opponent for Morrow. An agent in New York suggested Billy Fox, who's about washed up. Somehow the message was garbled, and Murray signed Bobby Foxworth, the Chicago critter who has a terrific punch. You know it from there. The youthful Morrow had that cheekbone busted up good and Foxworth got a technical knockout win. The bone was long in healing, and many question whether it can stand many strong blows now.”*

That night at the Oakland Auditorium, Morrow made a triumphant return by easily knocking out John Donnelly in the eighth round. On April 5, he dominated Watson Jones, scoring an easy eighth-round technical knockout at the LA Olympic Auditorium. On May 5, Morrow won a technical knockout against Oakland Billy Smith at the Oakland Auditorium. Just before the fight was stopped, he dropped Smith with a right to the jaw for a nine-count. On July 5, he won a 10-round unanimous decision over heavyweight Jimmy Bivins at the LA Olympic Auditorium. Bivins excelled in infighting; Morrow scored points with his long left jab while dancing around his slower opponent. On July 25, Morrow had no trouble with 208-pound heavyweight Johnny Flynn winning a one-sided 10-round decision at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium. On August 16, Morrow stopped Chile's Arturo Godoy in the 10<sup>th</sup> round at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium. The 38-year-old Godoy was only a shell of the fighter who once stayed 15 rounds with Joe Louis. The referee stopped the fight after Morrow had pummeled Godoy at will.

Morrow's six-fight winning streak ended on September 21 when he lost a 10-round unanimous decision in a rematch against Jimmy Bivins at the Oakland Auditorium. The crafty Bivins was in excellent shape for the rematch. Morrow managed to win one round and scored even in three rounds. Bivins hurt Morrow in the fifth round and gave him a solid beating in the sixth. He effectively landed his long right hand on Morrow, frequently followed up with an uppercut, and often drove his right hand into Morrow's midsection. Morrow's best round was the fourth round, where he landed several short left hooks to Bivins's jaw.

### **Morrow's rematch with Archie Moore was overshadowed by the way it ended**

On December 1, 1949, promoter Pat Therkettle from Toledo, Ohio, organized a 15-round boxing match between Archie Moore and Leonard Morrow. The aim was to draw nationwide attention to the winner, who would earn a chance to compete for the American Light Heavyweight Championship against the reigning champion, Joey Maxim, or the world light heavyweight champion, Freddie Mills. At that time, *Ring* magazine had Moore and Morrow ranked 2nd and 3rd in the light heavyweight division, with only Joey Maxim, the American Light Heavyweight Champion, ranked higher.

On December 13, 1949, Moore gained recognition from the National Boxing Association as the number one challenger for Maxim's title after knocking out Morrow in 30 seconds of the 10th round. This victory coincided with Moore's 33rd birthday; however, his celebration was overshadowed by concern for Morrow, who was knocked out and remained unconscious for 10 minutes following the bout. Morrow was carried to the dressing room on a stretcher and later taken to St. Vincent's Hospital in an ambulance for further evaluation and observation. Moore visited him in the hospital every day until he left.

Moore aimed to win the fight in the first round. He started with combinations of lefts and rights to the head, causing Morrow to bleed from the nose before the round ended. Morrow fought back bravely, but

Moore effectively covered up during times of danger and launched powerful counterattacks. Moore landed several solid punches to Morrow's head in the second round. By the third round, he executed a one-two combination—a right to the stomach followed by a right to the head—that landed heavily, causing Morrow to bleed from the mouth. Moore continued to focus on attacking Morrow's body, while Morrow, despite his quick hands, often had his punches fall short or get blocked. In contrast, Moore's left jabs had significantly more impact. Both fighters were busy and fought evenly in the fifth and sixth rounds, with each boxing carefully.

Moore launched another attack in the seventh round. A left hook and a right and another left sent Morrow reeling. In the eighth round, a powerful left to the stomach and a right to the head sent Morrow down for a count of seven. When the ninth round began, Morrow attempted to jab and dance, but his jabs were ineffective. Moore relentlessly pressed forward, landing sharp, short punches at close range. Morrow endured a severe beating and was finally knocked down again, receiving another count of seven before the round ended.

Morrow was exhausted as he stumbled back to his corner at the end of the round. Shortly after the start of the tenth round, Moore delivered a powerful right hook to Morrow's chin, causing the already wobbly fighter to collapse. Morrow's head struck the hard boards outside the ring, hitting the ground with a loud crack that echoed throughout the arena.

After the bout, Allan Moore, Morrow's manager, said Leonard would take a long lay-off and that he might retire from boxing. On December 20, 1949, brain specialist Dr. George Booth from Toledo reexamined Morrow and concluded that he was suffering from a severe brain injury and hemorrhages, suggesting he might not be able to fight for six months to a year.

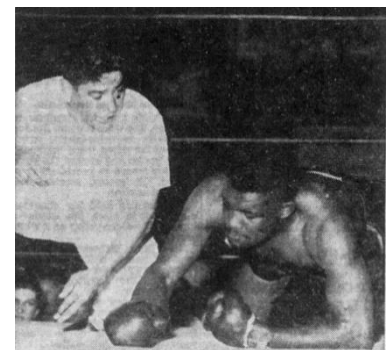


ARCHIE MOORE (LEFT) HELPS TRY TO REVIVE LEONARD MORROW  
Oakland fighter was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital after kayo

### **Morrow Returns to the Ring after an Absence of 17 Months**

Leonard Morrow began training for his return to the boxing ring in early 1951 in Arizona and Nevada. His manager, Allen Moore, declared that three specialists had examined Morrow, and all declared him fit to fight. However, he did not apply for a boxing license in California at that time due to strict regulations regarding fighters with a history of head injuries. Commissioner Joe Phillips stated that Morrow would need to undergo an encephalographic examination (a brain examination) before he could be granted a boxing license in California.

On June 4, 1951, Morrow made his return to the ring after an absence of 17 months with a third-round technical knockout of Ralph "KO" Hooker (AKA Bob Mitchell) at the Sports Center in Tucson, Arizona. After an almost even first round, Morrow knocked Hooker down in the second round for a count of nine. In the third round, Hooker was again knocked down for a count of nine and was dropped again, only to be saved by the bell. Hooker failed to come out for the fourth round.



*Hooker dropped in third*

On June 12, 1951, Morrow faced Colion Chaney at the Last Frontier Sportsdrome in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he lost a ten-round unanimous decision. Morrow pursued Chaney for most of the fight, but whenever he threw a rare right-hand punch, Chaney easily evaded the attack.

After his fight with Chaney, Morrow was sidelined for eleven months while working to reinstate his boxing license in California. While inactive, Morrow served as a sparring partner for Andy Walker, Joey Maxim, and Rex Layne.

In February 1952, the California Boxing Commission reinstated Morrow's license, which had been suspended after his knockout loss to Archie Moore in December 1949.

Morrow made his return to the ring on May 19, 1952, in Portland, Oregon, where he faced old rival Ralph "KO" Hooker. Morrow won the fight by technical knockout in the third round. Later, on June 9, 1952, he defeated Sonny Andrews in the fifth round at the Tucson Arena in Arizona. Andrews had sustained a broken thumb on his right hand and could not continue the match.

On September 16, 1952, Morrow stepped up in class and faced light heavyweight contender Harold Johnson at the Arena in Toledo, Ohio, but was defeated in the third round. The first two rounds were closely contested, but Johnson landed two powerful right-hand punches to Morrow's body, causing him to be knocked down for an eight-count. The final blow left Morrow dazed, prompting referee Tony Ousky to stop the fight. This defeat shattered Morrow's hopes for a successful comeback to championship contention.

On December 2, 1952, Morrow returned to California for the first time in over three years. He remained in California and participated in his final seven fights against club fighters and journeymen at various California venues, including the Richmond Auditorium in Richmond, the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, the Municipal Auditorium in Eureka, the Coliseum Bowl in San Francisco, and the Winterland Arena in San Francisco. Morrow won three by stoppage and three by decision while losing one bout by decision. His opponents during this period included: - Junior Payne (won by TKO in the 2nd round) - Sonny Andrews (won by points after 10 rounds) - Abel Fernandez (won by TKO in the 8th round) - Young Harry Wills (won by points after 10 rounds) - Frank Buford (won by TKO in the 4th round) - Willie Bean (won by points after 10 rounds) - Billy Gilliam (lost by points after 10 rounds).

After his fighting career, Morrow became a referee and boxing judge in California and worked for a Transit bus company before opening a barber shop in Oakland. Leonard Morrow passed away on August 2, 2000, at age 74.

**Primary Sources: Oakland Tribune, Oakland Post Enquirer, San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, Fresno Bee, Times Herald, Democratic Press, Santa Rosa Republic, and Toledo Blade. I sincerely thank Buddy Gibbs for sharing the insightful comments of Leonard's grandson, Timothy Morrow.**