

# Dan Bucceroni: The Butcher Boy

## By Dan Cuoco

Daniel Bucceroni was born in Philadelphia on December 3, 1927. His family included his parents, Ermeles and Mary Bucceroni, and his siblings: brothers Charles, Silvestor, Adam, Emilio, and William Bucceroni, as well as sisters Rose and Rita Bucceroni.

From February 1951 to February 1955, *The Ring* magazine rated Bucceroni for 43 months as a world-ranked light heavyweight and heavyweight contender, with his best rating as the number 2 heavyweight. He joined the U.S. Navy in December 1945 and served until October 1947, when he was honorably discharged from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center as a Seaman First Class and Boxing Instructor.



### From Amateur Phenomenon to One of the U.S. Navy's Finest Amateurs

Under the guidance of his older brother Charles, Dan Bucceroni began his amateur boxing career in high school in 1944. On January 18, 1945, he caught the attention of John Webster, a sports reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, during his debut at the Diamond Belt and Middle Atlantic A.A.U. Sub-Novice tournament. Webster noted, *"Talk among the amateur boxing fans last night at the Cambria was about the impressive Dangerous Dan Bucceroni, who scored a stunning first-round knockout. Bucceroni, a 16-year-old from 13th and Jackson streets in South Philadelphia secured a victory for Pen-Mar A.C. when he knocked out Joseph Augustine, a fighter from Allentown representing the Southside Boys Club, just 1 minute and 7 seconds into the first round. A swift right to the jaw—delivered with minimal wind-up—dropped Augustine flat on his back for the full count. In his tournament debut, Bucceroni displayed significant improvement from his recent special-bout appearance in his neighborhood. He is a tall, stand-up boxer who moved with surprising speed for a 175-pound fighter. He skillfully circled the crouching, jabbing Augustine and landed his jabs with precision. When Augustine launched a sudden inside attack, the determined Bucceroni unleashed his right hand. Once Augustine was revived, Jack (Stogie) Clemento, the manager of Pen-Mar, was grinning broadly, stating, 'I had to urge Bucceroni to enter the tournament, and he's definitely going to win the tournament title for sure.'* On February 13, 1945, Bucceroni won the tournament against Robert Lee Cobbs from Local No. 2 Shipbuilders (CIO) by an impressive decision, further solidifying his prospects for future honors.

Bucceroni joined the United States Navy in December 1945 and continued his amateur boxing career, impressively defeating opponents—mostly by knockout—in smokers for the 25th Regiment at Great Lakes in 1946. In 1947, while fighting out of Kenosha, Wisconsin, Bucceroni won the Chicago Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions in the light heavyweight division by knocking out Buddy Carr from Toledo, Ohio, in the second round. As a member of the Chicago Team, he also claimed the Intercity Golden Gloves championship at light heavyweight by defeating Johnny Stevens. Furthermore, while representing the Chicago Golden Gloves Team and the United States at light heavyweight that same year, he stopped Hennie Quentemeijer from the Netherlands. He also won the All-Navy Light Heavyweight Championship, concluding his outstanding amateur career.



In October 1947, he was honorably discharged from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, where he served as a Seaman First Class and boxing instructor. He was well-regarded as one of the finest amateur athletes ever

to represent a boxing team at Great Lakes. Buccheroni expressed his intention to pursue a professional boxing career upon his return to Philadelphia and stated that he would place control of his boxing affairs in the hands of his older brother Charles. Charles wanted to ensure that a competent professional team handled his brother.

## The Young Professional

Buccheroni made his professional debut on November 6, 1947, under the management of Frank "Blinky" Palermo and trainer Jimmy Wilson. Later in his career, he was managed by Don Battles and trained by Adolph Ritacco. He earned the nickname "Butcher Boy" because he worked part-time as a butcher and figuratively "butchered" his opponents in the ring.

In his first three years in the ring, he fought thirty-three times and compiled an impressive record of 32 wins, 1 loss, and no draws, with 26 wins by knockout. During this period, he primarily participated in four, six, and eight-round fights before moving on to his first ten-round match against James J. Parker on December 8, 1950. He won his first fourteen fights before suffering a close six-round decision loss to fellow prospect Dick Wagner. Throughout his early career, he defeated worthy opponents such as Johnny Calcinore (W PTS 6, W KO 4), Vernon Williams (W PTS 8), Ted Calman (W TKO 4), Rocky Jones (W KO 3), Wylie Burns (W PTS 6), Mike Jacobs (W KO 2), Jimmy O'Brien (W KO 2), Sonny Parisi (W TKO 1), and James J. Parker (W TKO 2).

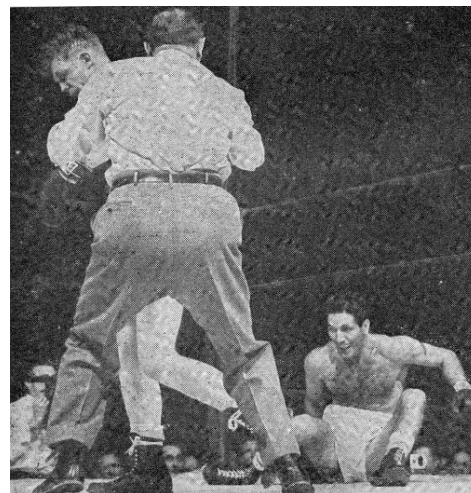
## Irish Bob Murphy and Dick Wagner

In early 1952, victories over Jimmy Bell (W TKO 1) and Jimmy Rouse (W KO 6) earned him a world light heavyweight rating from *Ring* magazine and the *National Boxing Association (NBA)*.

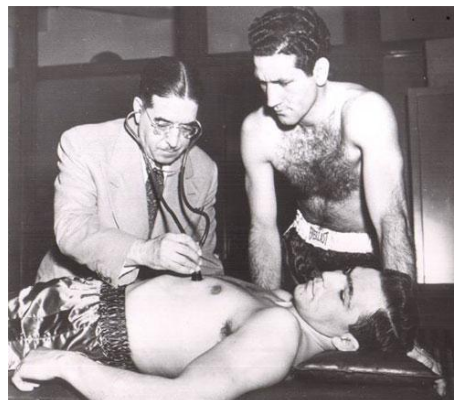
Buccheroni's attempt to establish himself further in the light heavyweight ratings ended in disappointment during his first main event at Madison Square Garden against experienced light heavyweight contender Irish Bob Murphy. Murphy, who was a 2-1 favorite, absorbed everything Buccheroni threw at him and gradually wore him down, ultimately winning by technical knockout in the fifth round of a grueling fight. There was only one knockdown, which occurred in the first round when Murphy landed a solid left hook to Buccheroni's jaw.

"Boy, can he hit," said Murphy. "He rocked me several times, but I always knew what I was doing. I was never dazed." The loss to the sixth-ranked Murphy dropped Buccheroni to eighth in the *Ring* magazine ratings.

On April 27, 1951, Buccheroni won a unanimous decision victory over Dick Wagner in a ten-round fight at St. Nicholas Arena, successfully avenging his earlier loss to Wagner at Yankee Stadium on September 23, 1948. Despite suffering a deep gash above his left eye, Buccheroni managed to drop Wagner three times, and both fighters ended the bout bloodied after an intense exchange. Wagner was penalized for three low blows, and although Buccheroni began to tire in the later rounds, he rallied to finish the fight strongly. This victory elevated him to seventh place in the *Ring* magazine ratings. (Pic. Dr. Vincent Nardiello, Dick Wagner and Dan Buccheroni)



**Murphy drops Buccheroni**



## Roland LaStarza

Victories over Lalu Sabotin (W PTS 10), Agostino Guedes (W TKO 5), Rocky Jones (W PTS 8), and Kevin Allen (W KO 1) did little to improve Bucceroni's standing in *Ring* magazine's ratings.

Everything changed on December 21, 1951, when he achieved an unexpected victory over number three-ranked heavyweight contender Roland LaStarza. This win propelled him to third in the magazine's rankings, placing him behind champion Joey Maxim and contenders Archie Moore (first) and Harry Kid Matthews (second).

Dan made the 3-1 odds against him seem silly as he handed the highly regarded LaStarza his second loss in 49 professional fights. LaStarza appeared sluggish and overly cautious after a long layoff and a bout with the flu, resulting in a disappointing performance in his first Madison Square Garden match in 21 months.



*Bucceroni lands a right in the 7<sup>th</sup> round*

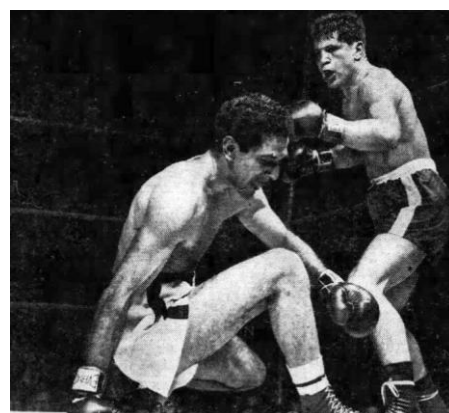
After a solid first round, LaStarza was wobbled by a right-hand punch early in the second. He teetered on the brink of a knockdown for several seconds while Bucceroni relentlessly attacked him with both hands. Crouching and holding on, LaStarza was in full retreat. When LaStarza tried to pick his spots, Bucceroni peppered him at will from long range from the third through the seventh. It was too late when LaStarza decided to go inside and slug it out in the eighth. He won the last three rounds but lost the decision without any argument. Both judges had it 6-4, and so did the Associated Press. Referee Al Berle scored it 6-3-1 for a unanimous decision.

Bucceroni's victory over Roland LaStarza left him sidelined for five weeks due to an injured hand. While celebrating the first significant win of his career in the dressing room, Bucceroni admitted that he injured the middle knuckle of his right hand during the fifth round.

Dan returned to action on April 29, 1952, stopping heavyweight Aaron Wilson in eight rounds in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He agreed to meet Roland LaStarza in a rematch for Madison Square Garden on May 30, 1952.

LaStarza evened the score with Bucceroni, knocking him down five times despite being on the verge of going down himself three times. LaStarza won unanimously in the first Memorial Day fight ever held at Madison Square Garden. Bucceroni's inaccuracy, along with referee Harry Kessler's laxity, significantly contributed to LaStarza's victory, in addition to LaStarza's powerful right-hand counters.

Throughout the bout, Bucceroni, weighing 181 ¼ pounds, missed more left hooks and straight rights than he landed. He was particularly wild when he had LaStarza, who weighed 188 ½ pounds, in trouble. Many of the 4,797 fans criticized referee Kessler for instructing the fighters to fight their way out of clinches instead of breaking them up. This benefited LaStarza, who excelled in close quarters.



*LaStarza drops Bucceroni in 4th*

LaStarza landed powerful right-hand punches to Bucceroni's head in the second, fourth, seventh, eighth, and tenth rounds. Bucceroni received mandatory counts of eight each time, except in the fourth round when he staggered to his feet on the count of nine. The bell rang quickly after he got up in the fourth, seventh, and eighth rounds, likely saving him from further damage. In the fifth, seventh, and eighth rounds, Bucceroni

staggered LaStarza badly, and he nearly collapsed. However, LaStarza remarkably recovered from his dazed state in the seventh and eighth rounds to knock down Bucceroni.

Dr. Vincent Nardiello advised referee Kessler to “*stop it if he goes down again*” as they came out for the ninth round. However, when Bucceroni went down for the last time in the tenth round with only seconds remaining, Kessler allowed him to finish the fight. Referee Kessler and Judge Bill Healy scored the fight in favor of LaStarza with a tally of 6-3-1, while Judge Harold Barnes scored it 8-2. The United Press also favored LaStarza, with a score of 7-2-1.

## Bucceroni’s Return to Contendership

Bucceroni was out of the ring for almost five months and made his comeback against the largest opponent he had ever faced: Dave Davey from Tacoma, Washington. Standing at 6 feet 2 ½ inches and weighing 211 pounds, Davey had a size advantage, as Bucceroni gave away 23 ½ pounds. Despite this, Bucceroni, 187 ½ pounds, the heaviest of his career, won a very close unanimous decision. He was fortunate to score a knockdown in the second round with a right to the chin, which resulted in a nine-count. Additionally, he had Davey on unsteady legs due to his right hand in the fourth and fifth rounds.



Davey nearly won in the final half of the fight as his long left jabs opened a gash on the bridge of Bucceroni’s nose, and his flurry of punches at close range raised a bruise under Bucceroni’s right eye. Referee Al Burle scored the bout in favor of Bucceroni, 5-4-1. Judge Jack O’Sullivan scored it evenly at 4-4-2 but favored Bucceroni by points, 6-4. Judge Arthur Aidala scored it 4-4-2 on rounds but favored Bucceroni by points, 7-5. *(Pic. Bucceroni drops Davey in the second round)*

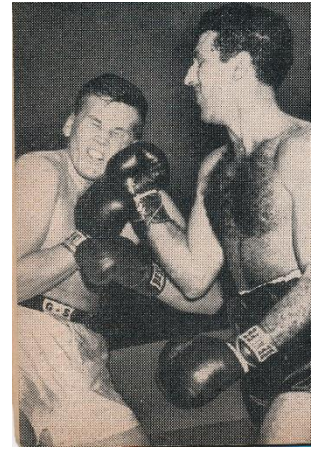
On November 14, 1952, weighing 185 pounds, Bucceroni ended Danny Nardico's nine-fight winning streak by winning a ten-round unanimous decision in a nationally televised bout at Madison Square Garden. Bucceroni stepped in as a substitute for an ill Jake LaMotta and was favored at 2-1. Bucceroni dominated the fight in the early rounds, landing powerful left hooks repeatedly on Nardico's face. Despite this, Nardico kept moving forward, trying to close the distance and attack Bucceroni. In the eighth round, Nardico landed his best punch of the night, a right hand to Bucceroni's jaw, which hurt him. However, a powerful right-hand punch over Nardico's left ear early in the tenth round resulted in the only knockdown of the intense match. *(Pic. Nardico vs Bucceroni)*



On January 27, 1953, Bucceroni won a unanimous 10-round decision against Rocky Jones in a match that marked the conclusion of the Annual Deborah Sanatorium Fund ring program. The fight took place at the Philadelphia Arena, attracting an audience of 5,013 spectators and generating a gate of \$18,901.50, which is equivalent to approximately \$231,780.74 in 2025 purchasing power. Bucceroni effectively utilized his left hooks and right crosses, defeating Jones for the third consecutive time since their first encounter in 1950. The course of the fight was established in the early rounds, as both boxers aimed to end it with a single powerful punch.

After losing to LaStarza and long inactivity, he was removed from *Ring* magazine's light heavyweight ratings.

Dan returned to the ring on April 3, 1953, weighing in at 193 ½ pounds, the heaviest of his career. He faced off against Dave Davey, who weighed 208 ½ pounds, and defeated him in the eighth round at St. Nick's Arena. After losing the first round, Dan dominated the fight, turning Davey into a punching bag. This victory marked Bucceroni's second consecutive win over Davey. Dr. Vincent Nardiello, observing the fight, called for the match to be stopped after the eighth round. Although there were no knockdowns, Davey showed signs of fatigue, with bruising visible around both eyes. In the seventh round, Bucceroni landed seventeen consecutive punches before Davey could respond, and in the eighth round, Bucceroni unleashed a series of twelve straight blows against his opponent. **(Pic. Bucceroni stops Davey in the eighth round)**



On May 4, 1953, Bucceroni defeated eighth-ranked Wes Bascom by a seventh-round technical knockout at the Milwaukee Auditorium. Bascom trailed on the scorecards when Bucceroni sent his mouthpiece into the second row with a powerful right hand. As he covered up and bled from the mouth, referee Ted Jamieson stopped the fight.

On July 22, 1953, Bucceroni pounded out a ten-round unanimous decision over Tommy Harrison at Chicago Stadium but emerged with badly bruised knuckles in his right hand from the one that sent Harrison to the canvas in the first round. Harrison was dazed then and also after the seventh and eighth rounds. Bucceroni suffered a deep gash on his right eyebrow in the seventh round. He said Harrison butted him. The bruised knuckles kept him out of action for two and a half months.

Bucceroni's winning streak boosted his rating in *Ring* magazine. He rose to #8 in March, climbed to #5 from April through June, reached #3 in July and August, and eventually secured the #2 spot in September. However, he dropped two places in October's ratings after Ezzard Charles and Nino Valdes moved ahead of him due to his inactivity.

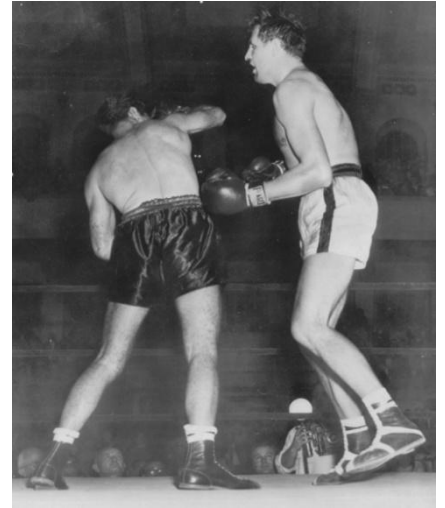
On October 14, 1953, Dan Bucceroni defeated Jimmy Slade by unanimous decision at the St. Louis Arena. The early rounds were uneventful until the fourth when Bucceroni knocked down Slade with a right hand. Slade got up just before the count of ten and held on for the rest of the round. Slade recovered and came back strong in the fifth, using a hit-and-run tactic to keep Bucceroni at bay. The fight intensified in the eighth round as Slade cornered Bucceroni, but despite trading punches in the final rounds, he couldn't overcome the earlier knockdown and lost the fight.



***Bucceroni stops Beshore***

On November 18, 1953, Bucceroni moved closer to a world title fight with Rocky Marciano after an easy eight-round technical knockout over Freddie Beshore at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. Bucceroni dominated the fight, battering Beshore throughout the match until referee Joe Stone stopped the bout in the eighth round. Bucceroni won every round, skillfully evading Beshore's attacks while landing precise lefts and rights to both the body and head. In the fifth round, it seemed Beshore might go down as Bucceroni delivered a series of powerful lefts and rights. Although Beshore made some attempts to fight back, his best efforts consisted of a few wild punches that Bucceroni easily absorbed on his arm and shoulder. The victory moved him up to the number 3 spot in *Ring* magazine's ratings.

On January 5, 1954, Dan Bucceroni strengthened his bid for a shot at heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano by winning a unanimous ten-round decision against German heavyweight champion Hein Ten Hoff at Milwaukee Auditorium in Wisconsin. Weighing 188 pounds, Bucceroni took control of the fight from the very beginning and maintained his dominance throughout.



Although he had a chance to score a knockout in the final round, the 6'4" Ten Hoff, who weighed 215¾ pounds, showed his ability to endure heavy punishment. Bucceroni effectively neutralized Ten Hoff's significant advantages in weight and reach by staying close for most of the match and landing powerful left hooks. (*Pic. Bucceroni stuns Ten Hoff with a right in the tenth round*)

After the fight, IBC President Jim Norris announced that he would like to stage a title defense by Rocky Marciano on February 24, 1954, at Miami Stadium. He listed four potential opponents: Ezzard Charles, Don Cockell, Nino Valdes, and Dan Bucceroni, but he preferred to hold off on matching Charles until the summer at a New York ballpark.

## Tommy (Hurricane) Jackson

Dan Bucceroni's match against Tommy (Hurricane) Jackson on March 29, 1954, at the Eastern Parkway Arena in Brooklyn effectively ended his career as a formidable contender. The 22-year-old Jackson, a 2-1 underdog, wore down the 192-pound Bucceroni with a nonstop attack that had him reeling and bleeding, his right eye almost completely shut. Bucceroni never fell, but he was close to exhaustion when referee Al Berl intervened in the sixth round.



Bucceroni exhausted himself against the relentless Jackson, who weighed 199½ pounds. Jackson kept pressing forward, showing no fear of Bucceroni's famed knockout punch. Known as "the Animal" at Stillman's Gym, he retaliated after every one of Bucceroni's attacks with a barrage of punches that confused him. Jackson threw left hooks, jabs, overhand and underhand rights, uppercuts, and double uppercuts from every angle. Jackson hit Bucceroni with punches he had never seen before. Jackson brought up both hands together in a scooping motion, and in the third round, he battered Bucceroni four straight times with it. (*Pic. Bucceroni and Jackson square off*)

**Post-fight remarks:** "I hit him three times hard enough to put him away," said Bucceroni. "He's a good fighter." Bucceroni's manager, Don Battles, remarked, "He's inhuman." Jack Dempsey watched the unorthodox Jackson at ringside as he fought against Bucceroni and shook his head. "Man, he has an incredible amount of endurance," Dempsey said. "He doesn't punch hard enough yet, but he'll improve. With experience, he'll become a great fighter."

Bucceroni was the third notable fighter in two months to fall before Jackson's relentless attack (Rex Layne, W TKO 6; Clarence Henry, W PTS 10).

## Rapid Decline

Six months after his fight with Jackson, Bucceroni faced European Heavyweight Champion Heinz Neuhaus in Dortmund, Germany, on September 12, 1954. Weighing 192 3/4 pounds, Bucceroni lost a 10-round decision in front of 12,000 fans, with referee Alfred Nuss as the sole judge. Bucceroni felt he had done enough for a draw. Neuhaus, who weighed 213 pounds, effectively used his left jab and countered Bucceroni's advances with a sharp right hook. Although Bucceroni had success in close exchanges, he began to tire midway through the match, allowing Neuhaus to take control and prevent him from landing a knockout punch.

In his final professional fight on December 27, 1954, Bucceroni lost to Cesar Brion by a ten-round split decision at St. Nicholas Arena in New York. This defeat marked his third consecutive loss and represented one of the most rapid declines of any heavyweight that year. Bucceroni had ranked fourth among heavyweight contenders at the start of the year, but he had fallen out of the top ten by the time he faced Brion in the ring.

Brion, who weighed 203 pounds, and Bucceroni, at 195.5 pounds, engaged in a competitive match. Throughout the fight, Brion effectively absorbed Bucceroni's best punches and continued to push forward with long left jabs, often awkwardly followed by right-hand punches. Bucceroni suffered swelling under his left eye in the first round. His nose began bleeding in the second round, and more blood came from a gash in his left brow in the sixth round. He also had trouble with his mouthpiece, for he lost it or had it knocked out four times. The referee warned Brion several times for healing, rabbit punching, and butting.

Brion finished strong, taking the last two rounds and causing a cut under Bucceroni's eye. Brion's aggressive style and higher punch volume led to his victory. The two judges favored Brion, while the referee leaned toward Bucceroni.

After retiring from boxing, Bucceroni transitioned to television, where he appeared alongside stars like Milton Berle and Phil Silvers. He later became a businessman by owning a furniture store and several related enterprises. Additionally, he was a stockholder in Cloverlay, Inc., a group of local investors that supported Joe Frazier's professional career, allowing him to train full-time. Bucceroni got married and had two children. In addition to his business ventures, he coached, trained, and co-managed several fighters, including Stanley "Kitten" Hayward. He even wrote a book on self-defense. *(Pic. Adolph Ritacco, Hayward, and Bucceroni)*



Dan Bucceroni died of a heart attack on April 15, 2008, at the age of 80.

**Sources: Philadelphia Inquirer, Chicago Tribune, New York Daily News, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Kenosha News, Press and Sun-Bulletin, Binghamton, New York, LA Times, and several online premium databases. I sincerely thank John DiSanto and Roger Zotti for their insightful comments.**