

In a remarkably clear picture, considering it was taken in 1908, we see Billy Papke in the act of stopping the legendary Stanley Ketchel in the 12th round at Vernon, Calif. The referee with the straw hat is ex-heavyweight king Jim Jeffries.

PAPKE, VICTOR OVER KETCHEL, LOVING ONLY TOO WELL, SHOT FORMER WIFE AND SELF

By TED HARRISON

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.—On September 7, 1908, in a suburb of Los Angeles, Billy Papke knocked out the legendary Stanley Ketchel in 12 rounds, capturing the world middleweight crown.

Twenty-eight years later in Newport, a Southern California beach community, Papke shot and killed his former-wife followed by his suicide.

In the 19th annual elections, Billy Papke was elected to the official Boxing

Hall of Fame by the Old Timers Committee.

He was born William Herman Papke on September 17, 1886, in Spring Valley, Illinois, of German-American parents.

Spring Valley was a coal mining town. The mine was the only reason for the town's existence. The life of the miners and their families was harsh at its best and just plain cruel at its worst.

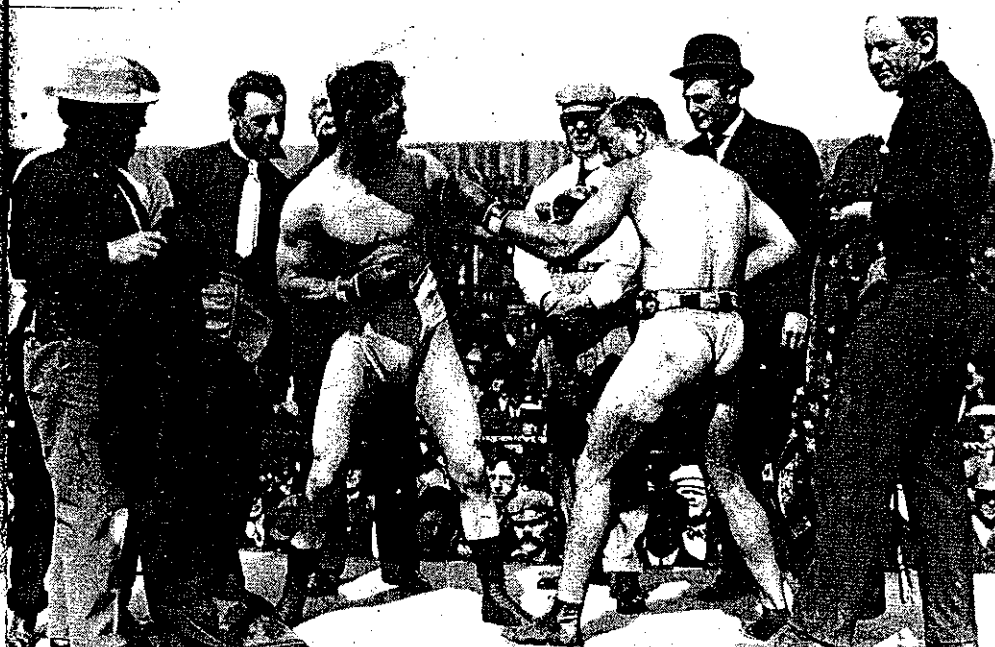
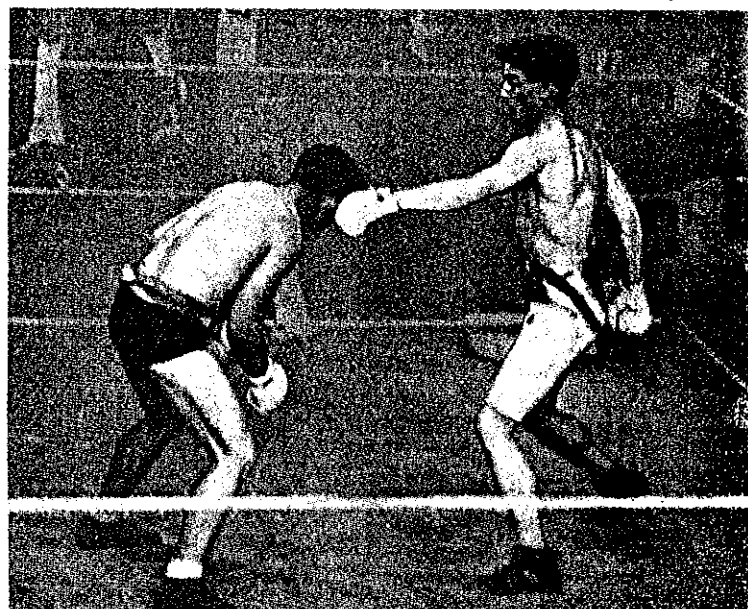
Billy Papke, hardly a teenager, went to work in the coal mines along side his

father. Beneath the ground in black, man-made caverns, Papke lost his boyish blond hair, blue eyes and innocence. He became aware of the harsh reality of a miner's life as the daily physical labor toughened his growing, teenage body.

In the evening after a hard days work Papke fought other miners in local amateur boxing bouts. For the most part the fights were crude street brawls with gloves. These tough young miners, sweating black coal dust, often used the



(Left) Billy Papke, sporting a fresh haircut, during the prime of his life. (Right) Jim Sullivan, an Englishman jabs Papke on the head, during the eighth round of their London contest. Papke, however, took care of Sullivan in the ninth, stopping him on June 8, 1911.



(Above) Papke (right) squares off against Hugo Kelly before their bout in Colma, Calif. on May 1, 1909. Papke stopped Kelly in one round. (Right) Papke displays the form which brought him the 160-pound championship.



bouts as an outlet to settle their personal disputes.

Papke became the best, often taking on and kayoing much heavier opponents. He was tough, he could hit, but most of all he wouldn't quit until he'd won. Billy Papke not only liked to fight, but he also saw it as a means to escape from a lifetime in the mines.

Papke's reputation grew beyond Spring Valley. He turned pro and began fighting in Peoria and La Salle, Illinois towns where promising young Chicago boxers came to pick up a few extra bucks. Then it was bigger fights in Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Boston.

It was in Boston on November 22, 1907, that Papke knocked out both

Bartley Connolly and Charles Haghey in two fights which totaled less than five rounds.

Billy Papke and the great Stanley Ketchel met in the ring four times. Their first fight took place in Milwaukee on June 4, 1908.

Papke entered the ring with a record of 29 wins, no losses and 17 KO's.

Ketchel, whom many consider, pound for pound, boxing's all time greatest, had won the middleweight title earlier in the year by knocking out Mike "Twin" Sullivan in one round in Colma, California. Although the title was not at stake, this was still the most important fight in Papke's young career.

In this first meeting, Papke lost a

10-round decision to Ketchel.

Papke claimed he was fouled in the first round and never fully recovered.

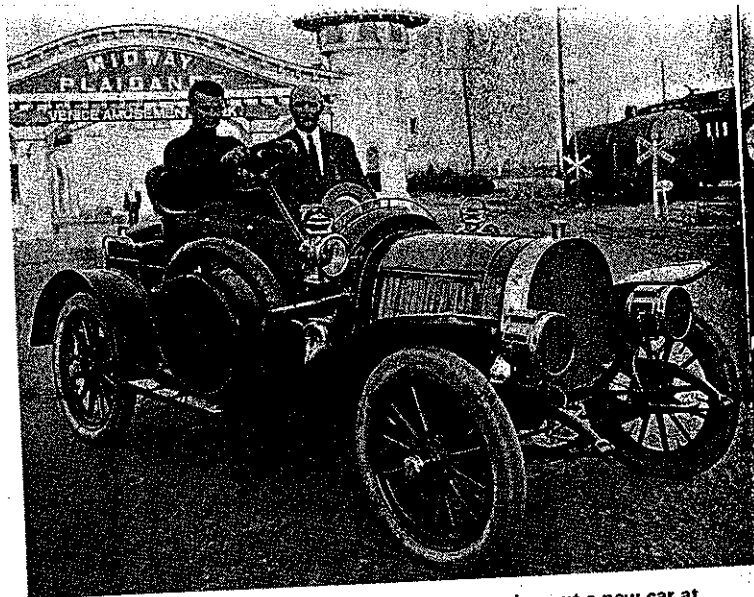
Even though he lost, he left the ring confident he could beat Ketchel in a rematch.

Three months later Papke and Ketchel met for the second time in a suburb of Los Angeles called Vernon.

In the interim, Papke had fought four times, including a one-round KO over the highly rated Frank Mantell in Boston. Papke had trained hard and was in the best condition of his career. This time he was a self-confident, slightly cocky, challenger. He even predicted in the press he'd be the next world middleweight champion by a knockout.



Here is a group of American fighters and observers who traveled en masse to Australia many years ago. Left to right (Bottom row): Papke, writer Tom Andrews, Owens, Jimmy Clabby and William F. Corbett. (Top row): Brandon, Ray Bronson, Judge Walter Kelly and "Cyclone" Johnny Thompson.



Here we see Papke and his manager, T. E. Jones, trying out a new car at the old amusement park at Venice, Calif.

In 1908, the Papke-Ketchel championship fight was the most important and prestigious match fought in the state of California.

Today the city of Vernon is in the center of Los Angeles' industrial district. At the time of the Ketchel-Papke fight, Vernon was a suburb surrounded by alfalfa fields and dairy farms.

The fight, promoted by Baron Long, was held at the James J. Jeffries Athletic Club. Jeffries had been promoting fights in an old barn converted into an arena. For the Papke-Ketchel fight a larger outdoor arena having a capacity of 7,000 seats was set up.

There had been little betting on the match, Ketchel being an overwhelming favorite.

The day before the fight the sky had threatened rain, but on September 7, 1908 a Santa Ana wind condition blew hot desert air over the mountains and down into the Los Angeles basin. The temperature soared to 82 degrees.

Ketchel insisted the long ride in an open touring car from downtown Los Angeles to the site of the fight under the blistering sun had sapped some of his strength.

Billy Papke never felt better. As he loosened up in the ring, his finely tuned body glistened under the hot Southern California sun. He was large in the shoulders, very narrow in the waist with exceptionally large thighs which tapered into slight calves. He had a sardonic smile on his face which never changed throughout the fight.

When the opening bell sounded, Papke seemingly forgot to shake hands and landed a straight right to Ketchel's throat before the champion thought of defending himself. From this first blow Ketchel began having difficulty getting oxygen.

Papke pressed his attack, immediately closing Ketchel's right eye. By the time the bell ended the first round, Ketchel had been down five times. His right eye was swollen shut and bleeding profusely. Blood trickled from a smashed nose. His left eye was closing. For all practical purposes the fight was over.

Eleven more brutal rounds followed as Papke, keeping his opponent facing towards the blinding sun, punished and toyed with the battered champion.

In the 11th round Papke knocked the Michigan Assassin through the ropes and off the apron into reporters' row. Jeffries, who refereed the fight, helped the champion back into the ring.

The fight ended in the 12th round. The beaten ex-champion, sitting on the canvas looking dazed towards his corner, was counted out by Jeffries. Billy Papke was the new world middleweight champion.

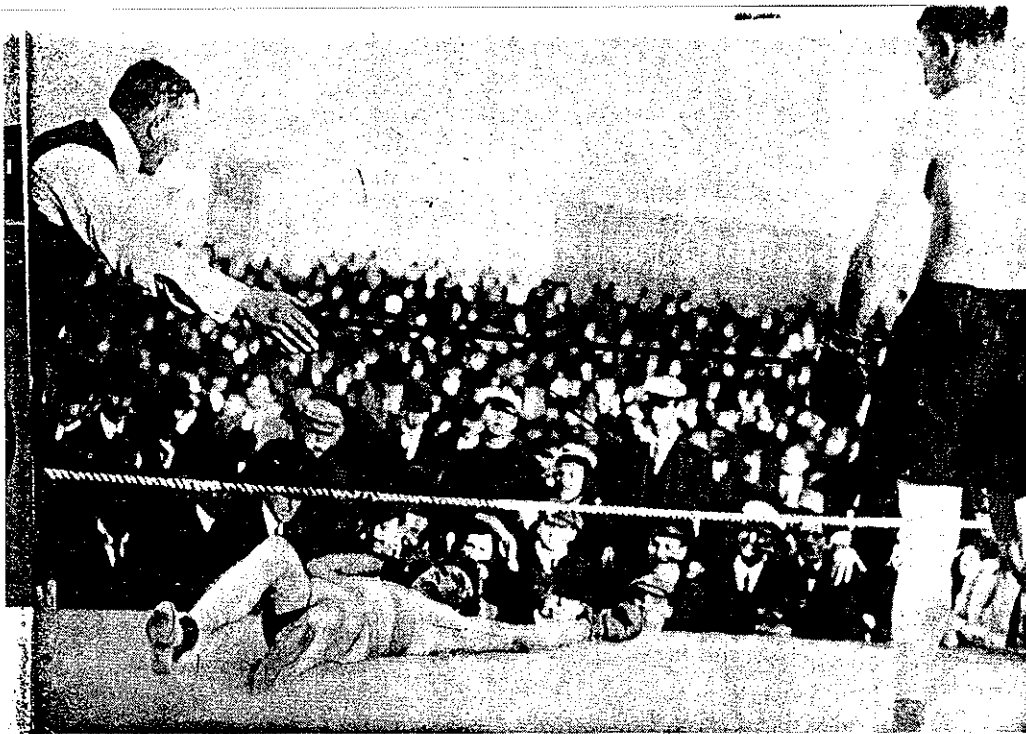
After the fight a reporter asked Papke why he waited until the 12th round to knock the helpless Ketchel out?

Papke replied, "When we met in Milwaukee we shook hands as the gong sounded. Ketchel not only held my hand in a vise-like grip, but pulled me toward him and hit me flush in the face with a hard left, breaking a tooth and knocking me down."

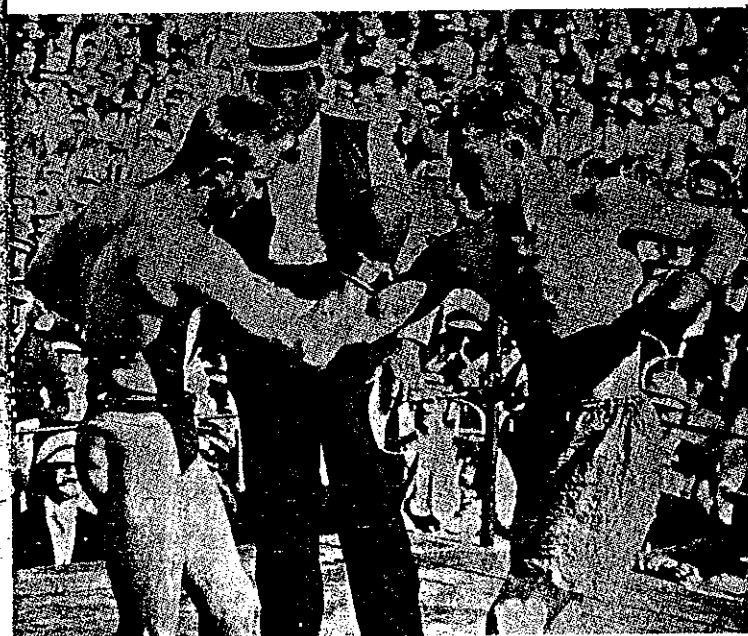


(Above) In 1926, Papke made his debut as a referee at the Pasadena (Calif.) Armory. From left: Abe the Newsboy; Papke, sportswriter Bob Edgren, promoter Morris Cohen and Baby Joe Gans. (Right) Papke is shown milking a cow at his big dairy farm at Altadena, Calif.





(Above) Ketchel gets his revenge by stopping Papke in the 11th round of their third fight, at San Francisco, thus regaining the middleweight crown. It happened on November 26, 1908. (Left) Papke (left) and Ketchel square off before their second meeting in which Papke won the world title.



Billy Papke gives his son, Billy Jr. some pointers before he makes his pro ring debut in Chicago in June, 1931. Billy Jr. was a light heavyweight of some note.

"Right then I decided to get even for that trick, and this was the main reason why I made the match with him here at Vernon. I could have finished Ketchel much sooner, but I figured he deserved an extra dose of punishment."¹

Ten weeks later in San Francisco, on November 26, Papke and Ketchel met for the third time.

Ketchel, in tip top condition, returned the favor, winning back the middleweight title.

His brutal kidney punches in the opening rounds took the steam out of Papke, who absorbed a vicious beating until he collapsed in the 11th round. It was the kind of beating from which a fighter never fully recovers.

The next year, 1909, was the most dismal year of Billy Papke's career. He lost a third and final time to Stanley

Ketchel in a championship bout held north of San Francisco in Colma, California.

Four other bouts were no decisions. He'd had one win in six starts and his career seemed at an end.

However, in 1910, Papke won his first four fights, including a KO victory over the highly respected Joe Thomas. Suddenly everything was going right for Papke.

He even finally managed to convince the woman he loved to marry him. In July of 1910, Billy Papke and Edna Eloise were married in Buffalo, New York.

Papke's good fortune continued when on October 15, 1910, middleweight champion Stanley Ketchel was shot and killed by Walter Diple, a jealous ranch hand, at Conway, Missouri.

Ketchel's death projected Papke to the top of the middleweight division. He claimed the middleweight crown, but in his first defense, lost the title in 20 rounds to Johnny "Cyclone" Thompson in Sidney, Australia.

In 1912, Thompson vacated the title when he could no longer make the middleweight limit, which at that time was 158 pounds.

Again Papke claimed the title. The middleweight crown was claimed also by Mike Gibbons, Eddie McGoorty, Frank Klaus and George Chip. It remained in dispute for two years until Al McCoy was crowned champion.

Papke defended his share of the title three times in 1912. He lost his share of the title on a foul the following year to Frank Klaus in a match at Paris, France.

Billy Papke retired from the boxing ring in 1913. His career had spanned eight years. He'd fought a total of 63 bouts and had lost only nine. Three of those nine losses were by the hands of Stanley Ketchel.

In 1919 Papke came out of retirement and fought one last bout, winning a four-round decision over Soldiers Bartfield in San Francisco.

Papke settled down to an early retirement in Altadena, California with

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(Continued from page 17)

Edna and their three sons. Unlike many boxers at the end of their careers, Papke was quite secure financially. He had extensive property holdings in Altadena as well as a 10 acre citrus grove in the Los Angeles suburb of San Dimas.

At the time of his death in 1936, when a beer was still a dime, Papke's estate was valued at \$75,000.

Retirement brought on difficult times for Papke. For more than a decade his whole life had revolved around boxing. Suddenly, there was no more training, no more preparing for the next fight.

Papke had been an aggressive and often violent man in the ring. Retired, he no longer had a physical outlet for that aggression.

When Papke ended his boxing career he was still in his late twenties, near the peak of his life physically. He was a restless, goal-oriented human being who for the first time in his life had no goals.

As time passed, Papke's marital relationship with Edna began to deteriorate. Billy had always been very much in love with Edna. He was also extremely jealous.

When most of Papke's time had been occupied with his boxing career, this jealous trait had made their marriage difficult. Now that he was around home much of the time, with little or nothing to do, his extreme jealousy made life for Edna impossible.

Another difficulty with the Papke's marriage was the fact that Edna was a product of the roaring 20's and was the liberated American woman of the thirties. On the other hand, Billy had been brought up in the tradition of immigrant midwestern coal miners where the husband ruled the household with an iron hand.

Billy had always disapproved of the dances and parties given by Mrs. Papke's wealthy, college-educated friends. He was not much of a drinker or socializer. Having had little formal education, he felt extremely uncomfortable at these parties.

His jealous nature towards Edna didn't help much, either. On a couple of occasions he created a scene at the parties by loudly accusing his wife of flirtatious behavior with other men.

Eventually Papke stopped attending the parties and curtailed Edna's social life almost completely.

In 1935, as the Papke's youngest son, Robert, approached his 21st birthday, Edna moved from their Altadena home and took up separate residence in an apartment on wealthy Balboa Island.

She claimed the ocean air relieved her hay fever condition. Billy believed she

was meeting other men for immoral purposes, although there's nothing to indicate any impropriety in Mrs. Papke's life.

Papke, fighting his last fight, repeatedly visited his wife, pleading for reconciliation. When she would refuse him he often left in a rage, threatening to kill her.

Mrs. Papke's neighbors had advised her to swear out a complaint against Billy, but she scoffed at the threats, saying, "Billy will never hurt me."²

In August of 1936, Edna Papke received her final judgement of divorce by default.

Even though Billy Papke hadn't contested the divorce in court, he continued his visits to Edna's Balboa apartment imploring reconciliation. He would usually wind up losing his temper and again threaten to kill both his wife and himself.

On one of these occasions Papke pulled out a gun. His sons intervened, taking the gun from him, unloading and hiding it.

Edna Papke now realized the seriousness of Billy's threats. She finally consented to go with a close friend to Los Angeles the day after Thanksgiving to get the authorities to protect her.

But, on November 26, 1936, Thanksgiving Day, Billy Papke was working at Fireman Jim Flynn's cafe and ten cent beer parlor. Papke acted as host for the downtown Los Angeles Main Street bar just to kill time and keep his mind occupied.

Although he had never been much of a drinker, he began to hit the bottle hard after his wife left him. This day, as usual, he'd been drinking quite heavily as he mingled with the customers.

Shortly before 5 p.m., Papke came over to Ben Rosenberg, owner of Fireman Jim Flynn's, and threw an arm around him.

"Is anything troubling you, Ben?" Papke asked.

"Not a thing," Rosenberg replied. "I'm going home for that turkey dinner."

"I'll go too," muttered Papke.

Papke turned from Rosenberg, brushed aside an effusive customer and without saying another word, left the bar.

Outside, a gaudy poster proclaimed: "Meet Billy Papke, your host. Enjoy the personality and simplicity of a great fighter."

Papke got into his car and drove the 25 miles to his wife's Balboa Island address.

Helen Cabanne, the apartment manager, was in Mrs. Papke's sitting room when there was a knock on the door and Billy Papke entered.

"Is mommie here?" Papke asked.

About that time Mrs. Papke entered the room from her dressing room. Helen

Cabanne became terrified, knowing of the threats Papke had made. Hurriedly, she tried to leave the apartment, but the door was jammed.

While Mrs. Cabanne struggled with the door, Billy Papke drew a .38 caliber revolver, pressed it against Edna Papke's breast, and fired.

Mrs. Cabanne managed to jerk the door open and fled down the outside stairs. As she ran she heard two more shots. Paralyzed with fear, she hid in the garage from where she heard another two shots. She flagged down a passing car, then called the police.

There was no inquest. The authorities marked off the case as a murder and a suicide. Edna Papke had been shot three times. Billy had then shot himself in the chest twice. Billy Papke was 50, Edna Eloise was 46.

After Papke's death, H.B. Murray, a former prizefight manager and one of Papke's closest friends, was quoted in the local newspaper:

"Billy Papke was a one woman man and because he never loved—or even paid any attention, to any other woman than his wife, he killed his wife and then took his own life."

Murray continued, "The same stubborn will which took him to heights in the prize ring made it impossible for him to accept defeat in his domestic affairs."

"He once told me after they separated, I'll get her back if I have to use a gun on both of us."

"She's not going to leave me. And no man is ever going to boast he took Billy Papke's wife to a dance."

WEPNER EASY VICTOR OVER "MOLEMAN" WILLIAMS

By RONNIE "BURNS" BOUSE

NORTH BERGEN, N.J.—Promoter Jimmy Colotto ushered in the 1974 boxing year at North Bergen's Embassy Hall with N.J. heavy champ Chuck Wepner going against Billy "Moleman" Williams of Vineland, a sparemate of Joe Frazier's, in the star attraction of ten rounds and the co-feature spotlighted Newark's Reggie Jones of Olympic Fame. This attractive card sold out the house, a rarity these days in boxing.

When the bell rang to start the main go, it was apparent Wepner had come to fight as he met his foe with a barrage of blows. But crafty Williams, who was seconded by Eddie Futch, the trainer of Joe Frazier, went on the run with the Ali shuffle.

Wepner smashed his foe into the ropes with jabs, then raked the cute Williams with body blows. At the end, ref Ronnie Burns had "Big" Chuck the winner, 8 rounds to 2.

The six-round semi was a thriller. Reggie Jones crossed gloves with tough New York Carlos "The Bomb" Stevens from Santo Domingo, who, three nights before, had KO'd the undefeated John Copobianco at the Felt Forum in N.Y. It appeared that Jones, who was making his first pro start, was in over his head as he tasted some heavy wallops. As the bout went on, Jones began to show the class that won him olympic fame. After a heated exchange in the fourth, he flashed over a left hook that dropped his 160-pound foe for the full count.

Another six saw Wild Bill Carlson, 215, Dumont, add another KO win to his string when he dumped Sonny Brown, Philly heavy in the fourth.

In other bouts, Rube Gonzales, 135, NYC, outpointed Doran Viruet, 135, N.Y. in six. The opener saw Larry Giello, 158, Bayonne KO D. Saunders, 160, N.Y. in the first round.