



By MARK QUEEN

WE HAVE DELIBERATELY refrained from commenting on the second Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali)-Sonny Liston "fight" until now in order to thoroughly research the muddled circumstances attending that sad affair, review all available films and other photos of the brief action and digest reports of competent ringside observers before expressing an opinion on exactly what happened.

Our reluctant conclusion is that Clay actually decked Liston with a fairly hard right to the jaw and that Sonny, in truth, was momentarily stunned by the well-placed blow. We say "reluctant" because we had considered Liston something of a "super" athlete, rugged enough to weather such a shot without going down and --according to the record book--out. We had even dwelt on the possibility that Sonny could be classed with the greatest heavyweights of all time. No more.

Despite assurances from Sports Illustrated's Tex Maule that Clay had won the first fight in Florida on the "up-and-up" and was almost a cinch to repeat in Maine, we fully expected Liston to regain the title in the rematch--probably by a knockout. To say that we were disappointed to see Sonny floored by what appeared to be an ordinary smack on the whiskers is putting it mildly. We were flabbergasted!

Joe Louis, whom we watched take twenty or more blows of the same quality to the same spot before succumbing to Max Schmeling in their first fight, expressed our own views perfectly when he dazedly remarked, "I can't understand it. I saw this man (Liston) take the best punches Cleveland Williams could land without even blinking and Williams is probably the hardest-hitting heavyweight around today. And I saw him get his jaw broke (by Marty Marshall) and keep right on coming. I just don't know what to make of it."

COLUMNIST JIMMY CANNON, admittedly no admirer of Liston, was more caustic. Said Jimmy, moments after Jersey Joe Walcott stopped it, "There was a punch all right, but I didn't think it could crush a grape."

Rocky Marciano, interviewed before he had a chance to scan the fight films, said he thought Liston "must have slipped or tripped." The undefeated ex-champ insisted that "Clay was in no position to throw a solid punch. It looked to me like he started to jab or parry as Liston missed with his left and then added a little steam when his right was about six inches from Liston's unprotected jaw. But the way his feet were placed when the blow landed didn't give him enough body behind the punch to damage Liston that way. At least that's how I saw it."

Rocky recalled Archie Moore nailing him

A Right Handy Guy



THANKS, OLD BUDDY--Willie Horton(right), Detroit outfielder who is making strong bid for American League hitting crown, receives fond embrace from Hank Aguirre after his two homers, double and five RBIs helped Tiger southpaw defeat Washington Senators, 13-3.

with a short counter right that sent him to his knees, but he said, "It wasn't like Clay's punch. Archie was braced and let me have it with every pound of his weight behind the punch."

The mystery surrounding the blow that dumped Liston was heightened by the fact that earlier in the round, Clay smashed him full in the mush with a solid right lead that momentarily addled his features, but Sonny was able to shake that one off and continued to pursue the "flitting bee" all over the ring. That plus the fact that Sonny had never before been knocked off his feet and Cassius had hardly established himself as a "one-punch" knockout artist.

WHEN SONNY WENT DOWN and first pushed himself around on all fours as he looked up toward the center of the ring, we got a good

look at his face. We were able to inspect this film footage several times, including slow motion, and we are satisfied that by then he had recovered from the first shock of the blow and knew what was going on. When he again rolled over on his back attempting to rise, we're not certain if he had lost control of his legs or had merely lost his balance.

Which brings us to a point which we do not believe has been fully developed even at this late date.

Under a strict interpretation of the rules in every major boxing jurisdiction, as we understand them, Liston never was officially counted out in Lewiston, Maine!

It has been established that both Clay and Liston were instructed before the fight that in the event of a knockdown, the man inflicting the knockdown must go to a neutral corner and remain there until told by the referee to resume fighting or his opponent had been counted out.

It has been further established that Clay never did go to a neutral corner and remain there until a count was started over the fallen Liston! As a matter of fact, referee Walcott never did count over Liston at any time and his action in stopping the bout after the two fighters resumed fighting, which he apparently decided to do when Nat Fleischer of Ring Magazine stood up at ringside and started waving his arms back and forth, palms down, was unprecedented and undoubtedly illegal.

THE MERE FACT that the official timekeeper, who obviously lost a full minute in clocking the duration of the fight, confirmed that he had counted to 12 while Liston was still tumbling about on the canvas did not constitute an official knockout. With Clay standing over Liston screaming for him to "get up and fight" and then running wildly around the ring as Walcott consulted the timekeeper, an official count couldn't be started under the rules!

All this is purely academic, of course. As far as we can determine, the Liston camp never seriously challenged the knockout on this score. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali is still heavyweight champion of the world in all jurisdictions not associated with the World Boxing Association and will be regarded as such by the "man in the street", Ernie Terrell and the WBA notwithstanding.

So where do we go from here?

We'll try to figure that out in a later column.

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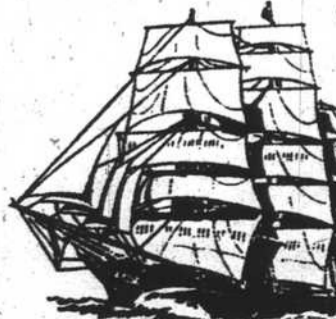


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