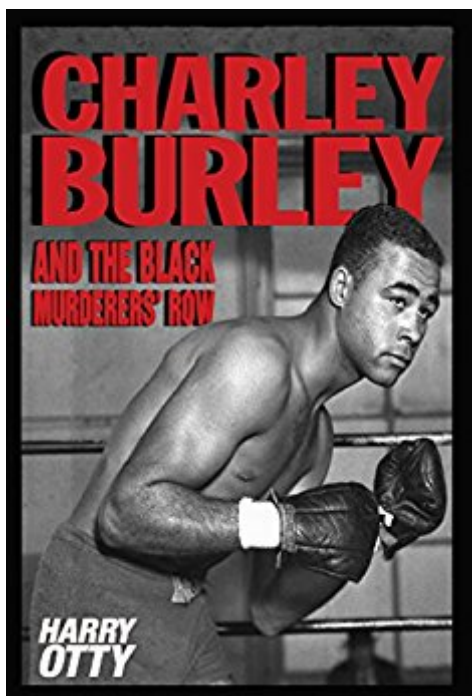


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Charley Burley And The Black Murderers' Row



Synopsis

Who is Charley Burley?"Too good for his own good" a statement that was made by many boxing managers and promoters of the 1940s when referring to Pittsburgh's Charley Burley. Arguably the greatest boxer never to win a world title, Burley was the most feared fighter of his generation and the most avoided fighter in the history of boxing. "Charley Burley is a legend in boxing, but the public doesn't know him because he never got the credit."

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Customer Reviews

When I moved to Pittsburgh in 1988, I looked up Charley Burley's address, and knocked on his door. I knew that many considered him the uncrowned Champion, from a time before the proliferation of boxing titles, when only eight men at any time could be considered a Champion. I knew he had fought fighters from welterweight to Heavyweight, and had beaten almost all of them. On the spring day he invited me into his modest duplex, he was an old and weathered man. I asked him about his career, and his toughest fights, but he revealed little. He was pleasant,

respectful, patient, but playing out the string. His living room was littered with cigarette butts, but he did not smoke in front of me. We spoke for twenty minutes or so, but he did not have an inclination to recount his career. He asked me say a prayer for him, and sent me on my way with a couple of autographs. This book filled in many of the gaps for me about a fighter many consider one of the greatest to ever step into the ring. Burley was born to mixed race parents, and raised with an inner code of decency which stopped him short of playing ball with many of the managers and fixers who had mob ties. Such alliances would surely have moved Burley to mainstream popularity, and a title shot. Burley's inner moral compass prevented him from taking anything but on the level fights, and his career stalled as a result. He took on all comers, but the best fighters of the day mostly avoided him, because they could not get big enough money to risk their upward ascent in the ratings. The book is titled "Charley Burley and the black murderers Row" and while Lloyd Marshall and others are profiled, there is not significant depth about those great fighters. There are things discussed in this book I have never read before (I have read hundreds of boxing books), such as Sugar Ray Robinson taking mostly safe fights during the heart of his career, and making really tough fights almost impossible to make by pricing himself out of the market for a fighter like Burley, and his ties to the mob, and even throwing the Maxim fight when he had it safely in hand. The subject must have been a difficult one to write. Burley stopped fighting in the early 1950's, and many of his peers were gone by the time this book was published. Much of the information came from his family and companion. Burley comes off as a decent, well respected man, who honestly took his God Given talents as far as he possibly could.

Harry Otty's book does a commendable job of informing the reader about Charley Burley the man and the fighter. Boxing fans will like that the author provides detailed descriptions of the action in Burley's important bouts; a brief background of most of his opponents and mini-biographies of many of his top-flight adversaries (such as fellow forgotten greats Holman Williams, Jack Chase, Eddie Booker, Cocoa Kid, Lloyd Marshall, etc); details of Burley's many hand injuries, and how they often forced him to put his career on hold and how they affected how he fought; background as to how Burley learned many of the techniques and tactics he would employ in the 'squared circle'; many interesting anecdotes about incidents between Burley and other fighters in and out of the ring (such as the time that ranked heavyweight contender Elmer 'Violent' Ray tried to show up Burley during a sparring session and ended up getting coldcocked); interesting tidbits of boxing's seedier side and how boxing politics affected the careers of those who didn't 'play the game'; the cited opinions of many of Burley's great contemporaries and other boxing experts as to his abilities and where he

stands among boxing greats; and Burley's professional ring record (which lists who he fought, when they fought, where they fought, how much each of them weighed, and the bout's outcome). Readers who aren't hardcore boxing fans will also enjoy this book because Otty reminds older readers and informs younger ones as to life in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, and illustrates what it was like to be a black man in that era. As for the complaint made by fellow reviewer 'Peter' that "the mystery why Burley didn't get a world title shot is not solved", well, Peter, it was. Harry Otty actually points out several reasons why Burley (who fought from 1936 to 1950 and was in his prime from about 1941 to 1945) never fought for either the welterweight or middleweight title, including the following: two weeks after winning the welterweight title in 1940, Fritzie Zivic and his manager bought Burley's contract so that Zivic wouldn't have to give his two-time conqueror a title shot and, after he lost the championship in 1941, Zivic held onto the contract in order to prevent Burley from coming between him and another title try; after the United States entered World War II, the world titles were 'frozen' so that the boxing champs could contribute to the war effort, so NO ONE was given a welterweight or middleweight title shot from 1942 to 1946; before the 'alphabet' title organizations (like the WBC, WBA, IBF, WBO, etc, etc) came along (and ruined boxing), there were no such things as 'mandatory title defenses', so champions were free to avoid any contender they chose to ('big fights' simply came about as the result of fan demand i.e. \$!); and the fight game and many of its champions were controlled by the mob, and contenders, like Burley, who refused to bow down to these thugs, were denied title shots (Jake LaMotta, for example, had to throw a fight with Billy Fox before he received his long overdue try for middleweight laurels). Add to all that the fact that Burley was a great fighter and that several of the post-war champs had been ducking him since before the war, and it's not hard to see why he never challenged for a title, which is a pity because Charley Burley was a hell of a fighter.

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