

TALES OF A OLD FASHIONED WARRIOR THE GEORGE MUIR STORY

Introduction

Every so often a gem will emerge that needs to be polished to tell an untold story. This is one such story.

The writing of the George Muir story started in a hotel bar in Hong Kong during June 2012. On the last day of our big OE, I bumped into a fellow Kiwi, who during the course of a few beers told me that his father had won the New Zealand Light Heavyweight title in 1934.

After further discussion, Mark (Muir) said that he would send me his father's scrapbook, which had sat gathering dust for decades. On arriving home, a look into the *Story So Far* did indeed confirm that Marks father had won the National Light Heavyweight crown in 1934. Further research revealed that George Muir also won the Australasian Light Heavy title in the same year.

True to his word Mark parcelled up his father's scrapbook and posted to me. On reading I couldn't believe the story that the scrapbook revealed. What the press clips revealed was a New Zealand boxer who mixed it with the best Heavyweight's in Britain during World War Two - and was surely one of the toughest New Zealand Heavyweights to fight on the other side of the world.

The George Muir Story

George Muir was born on the 25th May 1913, and learnt his boxing craft at Tuatapere at the bottom of the South Island. In the early decades of the twentieth century the Southland saw milling town produced an amazing number of boxing champions for a small country town.

Amongst those to have their first lessons in Tuatapere were George McEwan New Zealand professional and amateur middleweight champion, Dick Baker well known professional fighter who had plenty of success in the Army during WW2 and George McKay who scored a knockout win over New Zealand middleweight champion George Low, in a special four round bout at Rakaia. Other pugilists to come from the Southland village were Southland champions Jim Harper and J Steele, Mick Baldwin and Dick Bakers brother Wally. In the 1960's and early 70's Tuatapere pugilists included Errol Templeton and Peter Flurety who both won provincial titles.

While few details of Georges amateur career, have survived the nearly eight decades since he was at his zenith, Boxing New Zealand historian John Mitchell has provided details of his New Zealand National Championships attendance.

Representing South at the 1934 National Championships in Hastings. George defeated R Dawson (Wanganui) in a Light Heavyweight semi-final by way of a TKO and then met M Soane (Motueka) to decide the Gold Medal. Records show the Muir defeated the Motueka boxer on points to annex the 13th New Zealand Light Heavyweight crown. Later in the year he went on to win the Australasian Light Heavyweight title.

The following year George again represented Southland at the National titles held in Dunedin. This time he engaged in both the Light Heavyweight and Heavyweight classes. While he beat P Cowan (Hawkes Bay) and R Holden (Taranaki) in preliminary contests, George was denied a

chance to defend his Light Heavy crown when he was outpointed by Mick Howson (Greymouth) in the semi-finals. Denis Lindsay (Auckland) eliminated George from the Heavyweight division in a semi-final bout.

George turned professional in 1937, in what was an inauspicious debut. Facing Dennis Lindesay at the Auckland Town Hall on the 9 August 1937, George was knocked out in the third round.

The tough Southland sawmiller appeared to drop out of the sport until he resurfaced as Sapper George Muir in England in 1942.

The following story before George met Doug Rollinson for the first time tells part of his remarkable tale. Almost a unknown boxer in New Zealand before the war, George Muir who meets Doug Rollinson in the Town Hall next Monday night, travelled to England with the Forestry Unit in 1940 and there blossomed out as a fighter of considerable ability with wins over several leading English boxers.

George Muir fought as an amateur in New Zealand and in 1935 (1934) was the light heavyweight champion of the Dominion. In the same year he beat Australian light heavyweight champion Bill Burns, turning professional in 1936 (1937) he had one disastrous fight with d (Denis) Lindsay losing on a knockout, without little preparation.

It was not until he reached England that he won success. After a series of exhibition fights including one with Freddie Mills (future World heavyweight champion), Muir was sought eagerly by British promoters. In the 16 fights that followed he won 13 (Box Rec shows 17 fights with 11 wins).



Sapper George Muir

His wins included one over big Jim Wilde who defeated Maurice Strickland (NZ heavyweight champion) and went eight rounds with Tommy Farr (British and Empire champion), and one win over Arnold Hayes who afterwards won the British Army championship.

England 1942-43

v Al Marston

Sapper George Muir is some puncher. Tested against Cpl Al Marston (Stepney) a man who proved his toughness with first class men, he smashed Marston so heavily that the referee called a halt in the second round of a contest scheduled for eight rounds.

v George Davis

1) In a eight round contest, Muir fought and defeated on points, George Davis 19st 8lb, flooring him three times for a count of nine. Davis had fought Carnera (World Heavyweight Champion) and stood up to him for six rounds before being defeated.

2) George Muir the New Zealand soldier, the non-stop fighter who is very popular in Bristol, had to fight much harder for victory than in his previous fights. He gained a point's win over George Davis of Banbury who weighed 19st 8lb. This hefty boxer was floored four times for counts of nine, nine, eight and nine but lasted the distance.

Considering his weight, Davis a lance-corporal in the Home Guard, displayed a tremendous amount of energy. He took a lot of punishment in what was a thoroughly sporting contest. After the fight a spectator remarked to me – after such hard work tree-felling or wood chopping must be easy for Muir.

v Bill Wainwright

George Muir the New Zealand Army Sergeant and Bill Wainwright of Birmingham, the Midlands Heavyweight champion, fought a hurricane and keen fight. Muir, a frequent visitor to Bristol, met in Wainwright his sternest opponent yet. Wainwright was heavier by ten pounds. He scored by frequent lefts in the first two rounds, but Muir then warmed up and fought back gamely. Wainwright retired at the end of the fourth round with a cut eye.

v Marwick – One

Sapper George Muir of Invercargill, a member of the Forestry Unit (13.0) defeated George Marwick (13.11) heavyweight champion of the British Army – the referee stopping the fight in the third round, when Marwick's left eye was bleeding profusely.

Muir has now won ten fights in succession, six by knockout. His points decision include a victory over the Canadian Army champion (On reading the many different press clippings there appears to be a disparity of Georges record from bout to bout – our records show it was his sixth fight in England)

Muir, who is aged 29, was keen to beat Marwick by knockout. He won the first round after a cautious opening. He might have knocked out Marwick in the second, if he had not been to eager, after he broke thorough Marwick's guard. With two swinging right hooks to Marwick's head, which shook the Britisher, but he fought back, connecting with a right and left to the body. It was Muir's round.

Marwick opened the third round, with a left and a right and left to the body. He made Muir miss badly with a ferocious uppercut. They mixed it in the centre of the ring, after which Marwick's eye was bleeding badly. The referee stopped the fight at the end of the round.

Ted Broadribb, formerly Tommy Farr's manager, was Muir's second. Broadribb is taking an interest in the New Zealander, whose sting of victories is attracting attention. Muir was in the pink of condition, being fit from forestry work. He trains regularly, sparring with Sapper Derek Sutherland of Rotorua, also with Sapper John Brown of Auckland. They have a useful gymnasium fitted with light and heavy punch balls.

Brigadier RS Park of New Zetland Forestry United Kingdom and Lieutenant-Colonel JG Elliot, Officer Commanding the Forestry's Companies saw Muir win.

v Wilde - One

1) Previous to the big fight we saw eight rounds of concentrated fury. Jim Wilde of Wales and George Muir of New Zealand. Both were down in the first round and Wilde was floored again in the second round. Muir at a disadvantage of two and a half stone suffered a badly cut eye and up to the last round seemed to be outpointed, but with a magnificent rally on the post the *All Black* snatched a verdict which did not do quite justice to Wilde's better boxing.

George Muir the New Zealand sapper, is a pretty luck fellow, after beating big Jim Wilde last week his commanding officer came into his dressing room and handed him one pound and a receipt for the rest of the purse which was banked the next day.

v Bennett

The New Zealand Lance-Corporal George Muir knocked out Corporal Len Bennett, London in the third round of a eight round heavyweight contest at the Queensberry Club. Bennett who weighed 12st 3lb had to give Muir 18lb, which was too great a handicap. He gave his best display at the beginning but was worn down.

v Hayes - Two

The long waited clash between George Muir and Arnold Hayes was literally a smashing great fight. No quarter was asked for or given in the eight three minute round fight. Referee Mick Fox gave Muir the point's verdict, but it must have been a close call. I would not have separated them. Thus Muir reversed the first meeting of the couple in London, when Hayes won on points.

v Wilde - Two

The pace of the Wilde v Muir was the hottest I ever remembered in Bristol, in the heavyweight class. It was cracker, as I wrote on Tuesday, with no quarter asked or given. from my *perch* immediately alongside the ring I could see and hear the thud of the blows. There was a lot of weight behind the punches of both men, I can assure you of that. It is common knowledge that Muir and Wilde fought a draw – I thought Muir just won (Muir won on points)

v Hayes – Three

The first open air bout for some time at Bath saw the chief contest between George Muir, New Zealand Heavyweight champion and Arnold Hayes a coloured Canadian champion – which resulted in a win by Muir on points (The decision was hotly disputed by the crowd and Hayes camp).

v Marwick – Three

In his last fight in England Sapper Muir was beaten by Marwick on points. On this occasion Sapper Muir was substituting for another man at a days notice.

New Zealand 1944-45

v Rollinson - One

The contest between George Muir and Dog Rollinson last Friday was not exactly a crowd pleaser, as there was so much in-fighting, largely due to the desire of Rollinson to get in close and stay there. Muir who came close himself at the outset, tried to make it more open from the fifth or sixth round onwards. His efforts were nullified by the tactics of his opponent, whose policy was to lead a straight left, immediately smother up and come in close. There was certainly plenty of hard punching, but a lot of it was too short range to be spectacular.

The decision met with mixed reception, but in my opinion absolutely correct. In fact the Auckland may have been lucky to see the journey through as one of Muir's gloves came untied

at a moment when Rollinson was in dire trouble. If they met again I think that Muir would place the issue beyond any reasonable doubt.

v Rollinson - Two

Doug Rollinson of Auckland 12st 3lb, avenged his recent defeat by George Muir 12st 12lb of Greymouth, in a decision over twelve rounds. It was the fastest heavyweight contest for years and had the large audience on its toes round after round.

There was a lot of in-fighting - different from the frequent clinching which is sometime mistaken for it – and here Muir was superior. As they came to close quarters Muir's right hand was close against his chest, in position for a short uppercut, the Auckland time after time came in right over the top of it. Beating at Rollinson's body – a club like punch – Muir has nearly all his own way in close. Rollinson's best work was a looping uppercut as they came to close quarters.

The Auckland showed up better in round four, splattering the attacking Muir with snappy left jabs to the face and ripping his left to the body. More in-fighting and Muir was making his extra weight tell, leaning on the smaller man. Rollinson began to use his right uppercut. Rollinson's determined counter attacks in the fifth caused Muir to go temporarily berserk in an endeavour to shorten the fight with his right hand. Rollinson boxed coolly, sniping Muir with his left jab and making him miss with his right.

v Rollinson - Three

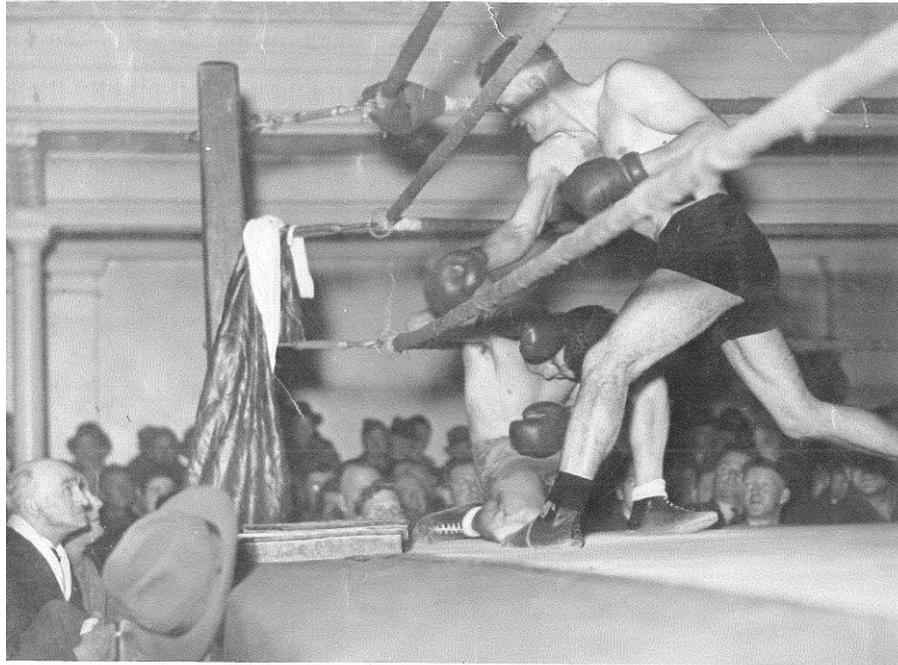
To stage this bout in the open air at Pukekohe showed great enterprise and it might be added a little gameness. Open air bouts in New Zealand have been few and far and the writer calls to mind the Peter Sarron v Tommy Donovan at Palmerston North which was a wonderful success while Strickland and Mullett fought at Athletic Park (Wellington).

The appearance of both men provided striking contrast, as Muir of the lean type, had the reach and nearly a stone in weight over Rollinson. Muir built up quite a impressive number of wins, quite a number by KO route while in England, but his much battered appearance has taken a lot of punishment during those fights. Rollinson strips well, with his weight where it is most useful to a fighter – very clean cut and hardly looks the part, except for a slight thickening of the nose.

The first round opened quietly with Rollinson doing the forcing with clean snappy punches and despite a disadvantage in reach scored with left leads to Muir's face. Muir had a style of throwing his punches and his body with them but Rollinson either blocked or ducked and Muir fell into a clinch each time he led.

The eighth round was the best and most exciting of the match. Rollinson went in hard with a right hook, then a right cross to the jaw and had Muir out on his feet. Rollinson went to finish his man but Muir covered up and moved about presenting a difficult target to Rollinson who was showing signs of a strenuous time himself. Muir came out intent on recovering by clinching and hanging on as much as possible in the ninth. Having carried Muir's weight quite a lot Rollinson was tiring too.

The last round saw both men come out in fair shape. Muir must have realised his only chance lay in a knockout as he forced the pace, throwing his punches freely from all angles, although somewhat wildly. Rollinson who's footwork all the way had been good kept out of danger and scored with a good right uppercut, with his left getting home regularly to the face. Muir failed to land a damaging blow but his efforts were responsible for a lot of the action. Rollinson scored again with a right uppercut and a good interesting fight ended with Rollinson the winner .



George Muir has an opponent on the deck

v Pascoe

The Greymouth Boxing Association had a good crowd on Saturday night when George Muir met Auckland boxer Bill Pascoe. The other bouts were interesting and the success of Muir was a popular one. Mr Frank O'Neil the third man in the ring, had not a hard task, the boxing being fair and clean.

The bout opened sensationally, as within a minute Pascoe took hard right to the temple, going down for a count of nine. The blow carried a lot of sting and obviously affected Pascoe, who seemed unable to cope with Muir's right hand for the ensuing three rounds. Just at the close of round three Muir's supporters were looking for a knockout, as Pascoe received severe punishment from several hard left hooks followed by a series of right crosses. However Pascoe was equal to the occasion and his ringcraft and gameness brought applause from the onlookers.

At the opening of the fourth round there were several bright exchanges, with Muir doing good work in close with right uppercuts and left rips. In the last minute Pascoe came back to score with lefts and rights to the head. The beginning of the fifth saw Pascoe make up a lot of leeway, piling up points by clever bobbing and weaving.

Coming up smartly in the eighth Pascoe showed an inclination to mix it, but his punches lacked sting, Muir doing better in the exchanges. Just before the gong Muir connected with a solid right to the head and Pascoe was on his knees at the end of the round. Round nine saw Pascoe make an effort to save the day by going for a knockout. He forced Muir into a corner, but Muir punched his way out and the close saw both boxers exchanging blows at long range.

The final round saw some very hard hitting with Muir definitely in the ascendancy. He was much the fresher and Pascoe could not cope with his speedy and well directed punches. The decision in favour of Muir was enthusiastically received. Muir boxed confidently throughout, though perhaps the heavy blow to the temple Pascoe received in the opening round made his task much easier in the early part. Pascoe showed remarkable gameness and ability to absorb punishment. His bobbing and weaving received applause, while the attempt to pull the chestnuts out of the

fire by making a determined effort to KO Muir in the ninth round showed him to be the possessor of stamina and pluck.

v Clarke

The Australian middleweight boxer Bobby Clarke 11st 12lb lost to George Muir 13st 11lb in his first appearance in New Zealand at the Town Hall, Wellington last night. Conceding also the advantage in reach he made a game showing. The referee stopped the fight in the tenth round.

Doing a nimble sidestep the Australian countered well throughout with straight lefts to the face as the big Greymouth man kept after him. Though down for a count of eight in the fifth and for a count of nine in the ninth, the Australian won the admiration of the crowd, by his brilliant display against the odds. The referee called a halt after 40 seconds had gone in the last round, but many people were of the opinion that Clarke could have seen the full journey out.

Muir opened aggressively and scored with a left rip to the body, but the Australian showed nice footwork and rode most of the punches. Muir also forced the pace in the second round and punished Clarke with both hands to the head in a neutral corner, Clarke dodge clear and called up applause by scoring with two straight lefts to the face. A hard right to the head put the Australian down but he refused to take the count. Clarke's eyes were showing signs of the punishment, Muir was stalking his opponent relentlessly but the Australian was showing nimble footwork and once Muir nearly went through the ropes when he missed with a vicious right swing.

In the fifth Muir rushed his man and put him down for a count of eight with a left and right to the head. In the sixth, Clarke shot Muir's head straight back three times with straight lefts to the head. In the seventh round, Clarke scored three left jabs to the face in rapid succession, Muir kept dogging him, but Clarke kept out of danger cleverly.

The Australian again scored well with a left in the ninth, but Muir caught him with a right, which sent him hurtling through the ropes and on regaining the ring took a count of nine, but rose to see out the round. Muir went for the kill in the last round and after 40 seconds had got the Australian in a corner and dealt out such punishment that the referee called a halt and hoisted Muir's right hand in token of victory. Mr Phin Stone was the referee and the judges were Captain C.J.H. Davidson and Mr W.P. Sommerville.

v Don Mullett (New Zealand Boxing Association Heavyweight Title – 15 Rounds)

The contest at Palmerston North between Don Mullett 13st 8lb and George Muir 13st 2lb for the heavyweight boxing championship of New Zealand, held by Mullett was a thriller.

Muir showed early he was Muir's superior, but the West Coaster certainly proved a game and dogged scrapper, with who the champion could take no chances. Right out to score a early victory, Mullett stepped up the pace in the second round, but Muir won a slashing round in which both handed "he-man" wallops.

Mullett made good use of his longer reach in the three succeeding rounds. Though Muir dodged, weaved and endeavoured to return the punch for punch, the challenger began to show signs of the gruelling he was receiving. To the spectators it seemed that the curtains were slowly been drawn, but they reckoned without Muir, who came back in the next three rounds and slamming lefts and rights, held the champion to an even break.

Muir came out fighting in the tenth, but linked up with Mullett's left hook, which shook him badly. Groping for an opening and working to get in close, Muir took a crushing right to the jaw

and went to the canvas for nine seconds. He was uncertain in his movements when he got to his feet again, but he still showed plenty of fight.

It was all Mullett in the eleventh, but Muir was defiant. Early Muir landed heavily on Mullett's jaw with a right, but a left and a right from the champion had George like a stricken ox. Was it all over? No! - Muir rose at nine, swung wildly with both fists, landed with the left and missed with the right and then took some real punishment, which had him wilting.

Though beaten Muir appeared determined to stick it out. He was up and down on a couple of occasions early in the twelfth round. Just when Muir appeared to be holding his own again. Mullett landed a left hook, followed by a right to the heart and Muir went down for the full count. Muir had proved a game challenger, but Mullett packed too many guns. Geoff Watchorn refereed the contest.

George Muir - New Zealand National Championships Record

1934 New Zealand Light Heavyweight Title (Hastings)

M Soane –Motueka	beat	Porky Neale –Auckland	pts
George Muir –Southland	beat	R Dawson –Wanganui	TKO
M Soane –Motueka	beat	Alf Bourne –Canterbury	pts
George Muir –Southland (Final)	beat	M Soane –Motueka	pts

1934 Australasian Championships (Invercargill)

George Muir – Southland	beat	W Burn (Queensland)	pts
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1935 New Zealand Light Heavyweight Title (Dunedin)

George Muir –Southland	beat	P Cowan –Hawkes Bay	pts
J Jones –Wellington	beat	Clarrie Cleverley –Otago	pts
George Muir –Southland	beat	R Holden –Taranaki	pts
Mick Howson –Greymouth (Semi-final)	beat	George Muir –Southland	pts

1935 New Zealand Heavyweight Title

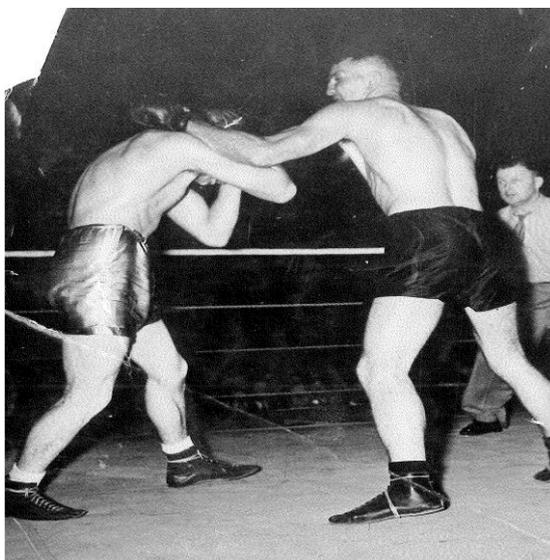
Dennis Lindsay –Auckland (Semi-final)	beat	George Muir –Southland	pts
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George Muir - Professional Record

9 August 1937 (Town Hall, Auckland)	lost Dennis Lindesay (1-0-0) KO - R3
23 March 1942 (Alexandra Theatre, London)	beat Al Marston (14-2-0) TKO - R2
6 April 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho London)	beat George Davis (31-19-3) KO - R4
18 April 1942 (Bath Pavilion, Bath)	beat Tom Kennedy (4-5-0) KO - R1
25 April 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	beat Bill Wainright (17-15-0) KO - R4
9 May 1942 (Colston Hall, Bristol)	beat Spider Edwards (0-1-0) KO - R4
20 July 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	beat George Marwick (23-5-1) TKO - R3
21 October 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	beat Jim Wilde (28-18-3) Points
24 October 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	beat Arnold Hayes (3-0-0) Points
2 December 1942 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	lost Al Robinson (29-9-2) KO - R3
3 March 1943 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	beat Len Bennett (14-3-0) KO - R3
17 March 1943 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	lost Arnold Hayes (4-4-1) Points
31 March 1943 (Colston Hall, Bristol)	drew Jim Wilde (28-21-3)
19 April 1943 (The Dome, Brighton)	beat George Marwick (24-6-1) KO - R3
23 April 1943 (Colston Hall, Bristol)	beat Arnold Hayes (5-5-1) Points

19 May 1943 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	lost Bruce Woodcock) (9-0-0) KO - R4
31 May 1943 (Colston Hall, Bristol)	lost to Martin Thornton (9-3-0) Disq
11 August 1943 (Queensberry Club, Soho)	lost to George Marwick (24-8-1) - Points
24 August 1944 (Town Hall, Greymouth)	beat Doug Rollinson (3-1-0) Points
31 October 1944 (Town Hall, Auckland)	lost to Doug Rollison (3-2-0) Points
10 March 1945 (Waiuku Sports Club, Auckland)	lost to Doug Rollison (4-2-0) Points
8 September 1945 (Town Hall, Greymouth)	beat Bill Pascoe (8-8-0) Points
1 October 1945 (Town Hall, Wellington)	beat Bobby Clarke (15-23-2) TKO - R10
15 October 1945 (Municipal Theatre, Hastings)	beat Jack Cossil (0-4-0) TKO - R5
26 December 1945 (Opera House, Palmerston North)	lost to Don Mullett (6-0-0) KO - R12
(New Zealand Boxing Association Heavyweight Title – 15 round contest)	

George Muir Professional Record Won 15 (KO 10) Lost 9 Drew 1 – Rounds Boxed 152



George batters a opponent

Post Script

While the usual form is to acknowledge all the press reports and photographs used in an article in this case it has been impossible. Nearly seventy years have elapsed since the stories went to print and George's scrapbook makes no reference to the where the individual articles and photo's were sourced from.

Also many of the articles are written in old-fashioned prose relevant seven odd decades ago. In many cases the punctuation is very different to today and in some cases have been changed to make the story more readable.

Barry Leabourn