

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING CHAMPION GENE TUNNEY



MEETS TWO KIWI BOXING LEGENDS

By Barry Leabourn

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING CHAMPION AND THE KIWI CONNECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

This is a tale about World Heavyweight Boxing Champion Gene Tunney and his meetings with two legendary Kiwi boxers.

The first part is the background and world title fight between Gene Tunney and Gisborne born Tom Heeney. Part two jumps forward to World War Two where Commander Tunney visits New Zealand and meets New Zealand first (and only) Olympic Boxing Gold Medalist Edward Morgan, on the steps of New Zealand Parliament in Wellington. We then look at the boxing people around Ted Morgan - with part three around one of the last visits to New Zealand by Tom Heeney.

The inspiration for the story came from two photographs that came into my hands. A photographic print came from Ted Morgan's son courtesy of the Boxing New Zealand Executive Officer Deirdre Rodgers. The second photo was of Tom Heeney, with the Southland Boxing team taken at the Gisborne National Championships in 1969, given to me by my very good friend Peter Fluerty. Years later another good friend Bruce Dodge who was at the Gisborne Nationals gifted me the Nationals Tournament program.

The story is a small snapshot of boxing through the first seven decades of the 20th Century, looking at some of the life and times of the people around Gene Tunney, Tom Henney and Ted Morgan.

Thanks must be extended to the various people and publications that I have used to tell the tale in this Kete.

The people and photographers who have contributed to the Wikipedia contributions to the story.
Brian O'Brien's "Kiwis With Gloves On".

Dave Cameron for photos and words

The Morgan Family for the photo on the steps of New Zealand Parliament

Peter Fluerty for his photo of Tom Heeney at the 1969 New Zealand Championships

Barry Leabourn

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PART ONE

THE WORLD TITLE CONTESTANTS

The gravel voiced man in the centre of the ring held up his arms for silence and as the chatter of the crowd died down went into his routine.

“Ladeeez and gentlemen” rasped out Joe Humphries, doyen of all ring announcers “now we have the main event of the evening. Fifteen rounds of bahxing action for the heavyweight champeenship of the world. On my right weighing in at one-hunnert ninety-two pounds from Noo York, the champeen - Gene Tunney”.

With the dying away of the applause, by no means as deafening as that which a few minutes earlier had greeted the introduction of the crowds deposed idol, ex champion Jack Dempsey (a spectator on this occasion) announcer Humphries then turned to the opposite corner.

“On my left, at two hunnert three-and-one-haff pounds, from Noo Zealand, the challenger – Tom Heeny”.

The occasion was as described by Joe Humphries. The place was New York’s huge Yankee Stadium, capable of seating 100,000 but not asked to do so in this instant. The date was July 26, 1928.

The referee, Ed Forbes beckoned the two fighters out into the centre for their final instructions. Tunney, tall and smiling wrapped in his old US Marine Corp dressing gown. Heeny several inches shorter, thickset, stern of features and cloaked by his distinctive Maori mat, a memento of his homeland that he had not seen for more than four years.

A few short words from the third man, who had already briefed the fighters at the weigh-in, then back to their respective corners to await the bell.
(Excerpt from *Kiwis With Gloves On* by Brien O’Brien)

WHO WAS GENE TUNNEY

Gene Tunney, was born James Joseph Tunney to a working class Irish Catholic family in New York City, on the 25th May 1897. His father worked as a longshoreman, loading and unloading freighter cargo at New York harbor and was a boxing fan for most of his life. Tunney’s father fought in matches at the Oweney Geaghan boxing club in the Bowery. The young Tunney got into fights on the streets of Greenwich Village, so his father gave him a pair of boxing gloves for his tenth birthday, in the hope that he would learn to properly defend himself.

At fifteen years of age, Tunney dropped out of school and got a job as an office boy at the Ocean Steamship Company, earning five dollars a week. He moved up to mail clerk and from there was promoted to freight classifier. During breaks, Gene sparred with any of his office mates, who were willing to shove desks and filing cabinets aside to form a makeshift ring. He further honed his skills at the Greenwich Village Athletic Club

In 1915, Gene Tunney became a professional boxer. His first match-up was against an accomplished young boxer named Bobby Dawson. Tunney's seventh round knockout earned him eighteen dollars and left him with a taste for more.

Gene Tunney, fought some 68 official professional bouts, losing only to Harry Greb in a fight where the World Light Heavyweight title changed hands. However Tunney fought many more unofficial contests in the ring, called "newspaper decisions" where the unofficial scoring was offered up by newspaper reporters. He lost none of the "newspaper decisions" but he said that he did lose to a ten round decision to Tommy Loughran while in the Marine Corps during WW1.



Gene Tunney in Marine uniform (photo - Wikipedia)

However Gene Tunney, is best remembered in boxing for the Battle of the Long Count, in the second fight with Jack Dempsey.

The Long Count Fight between Tunney and Dempsey, was the rematch from their first meeting, where Tunney had taken Dempsey's World Heavyweight title. The second fight was held on the 22 September 1927 at Soldiers Field in Chicago and drew a gate of \$2,658,660 produced by the 120,000 spectator's ringside, which equates to around 22 million in 2015 dollars. It was simultaneously the first \$1 million gate and the first \$2 million dollar gate in entertainment history.

The fight took place under the new rules regarding knockdowns. The fallen fighter would have ten seconds to rise to his feet under his own power, after his opponent moved to a neutral corner. The new rule, which wasn't universally applied at the time, was requested by the Dempsey camp.

Tunney was by all accounts dominating the fight, however in round seven. Dempsey had Tunney trapped on the ropes and unleashed a combination of punches that floored the champion. Apparently dizzy and disorientated Tunney grabbed hold of the ring rope while Dempsey stood over him. Dempsey ignored referee Dave Barry's instructions to go to a neutral corner

Referee Dave Barry ordered Dempsey into a neutral corner to no avail and by the time that the former champion finally walked to the neutral corner and the referee started his count – some 13 seconds elapsed before the count began. Tunney recovered and went on to win the contest by way of a unanimous decision.

Gene Tunney was elected the esteemed Ring Magazine first ever Fighter of the Year in 1928. He was later elected to the World Boxing Hall of Fame in 1980, the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990 and United States Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame in 2001.

Gene Tunney - Professional Boxing Record

68 Fights 65 Wins (48 Knockouts) - 1 Defeat – 1 Draw – 1 No Contest

THE HARD ROCK FROM DOWN UNDER

Like Tunney, Tom Heeney was born to Irish immigrant parents and came into the world on 18th March 1889 in Gisborne, New Zealand. The similarities between Tunney and Heeney continued with both brought up in modest circumstances with boxing being a family tradition.

Tom learnt to box from his father at a young age, with older brother Jack the first to excel in the squared ring. Jack won the New Zealand Amateur Welterweight championship in 1914 and held the Middleweight Professional title from 1919 to 1924.

Standing five-foot ten, Tom was a trifle short for a top class heavyweight. What he lacked in reach he made up with an explosive punch. For Tom there could be no sitting back and of necessity fought most of his battle at close range. (Sounds like a description of David Tua some seven and eight decades later).



Tom Heeney Ready for Action (photo - Wikipedia)

Tom Heeney excelled at other sports and was also a strong swimmer. He was awarded a bronze medal by the Royal Humane Society in 1928 for helping rescue two women from the sea off Waikanae beach in Gisborne. The aspiring boxer was a more than useful rugby player and represented the combined Hawkes Bay/Poverty Bay team, against the touring Springboks in 1921.

Turning pro in 1920, Tom won the New Zealand Heavyweight Professional crown at his third pro start, when he beat Albert Poole in Gisborne during 1921. While he defeated the best in New Zealand, one boxer that he struggled with was Australian Colin Bell, with whom he battled to a draw on their first meeting in Gisborne and then lost on two subsequent occasions.

Tom Heeney boxed in England and South Africa in 1920's, before moving to America in 1927. He beat Jim Maloney, Johnny Risko and Jim Delaney to be ranked number four in the World Heavyweight ranks.

A draw with Jack Sharkey, who would go on to become the World Heavyweight Champion in 1932, propelled Tom Heeney into the World Heavyweight title contest with Gene Tunney on the 26th July 1928 at Yankee Stadium.

The sobriquet of The Hard Rock from Down Under, was bestowed on Tom Heeney by renowned writer and journalist Damon Runyon, after his gritty performance in the World Heavyweight title fight.

Tom Heeney was inducted to the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame in 1996

Tom Heeney - Professional Boxing Record

69 Fights 37 Wins (15 Knockouts) - 22 Defeats – 8 Draws – 1 No Contest

MAKING THE GENE TUNNEY v TOM HEENEY FIGHT FOR THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE

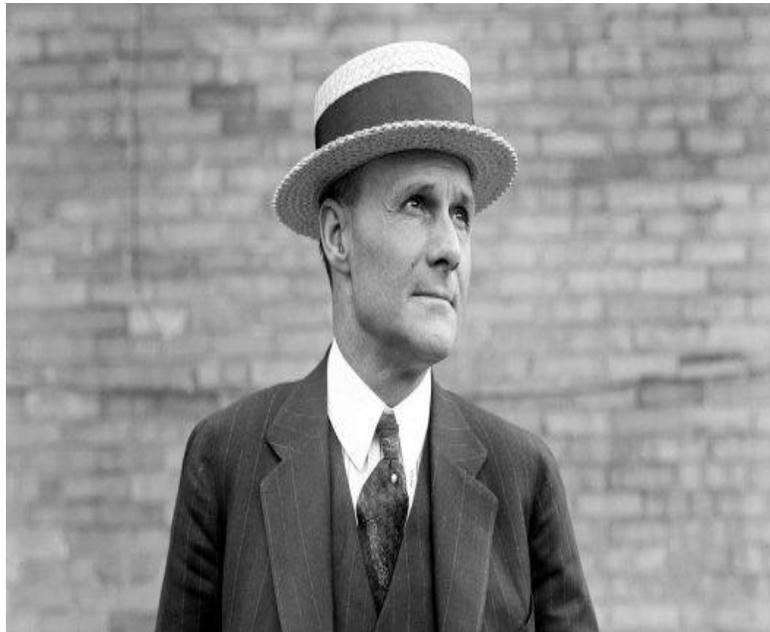
A 67 second knockout win over highly regarded Jim Maloney, along with victory against Johnny Risko who was the most highly ranked Heavyweight of the day and the defeat of Jack Delaney who had vacated the World Light Heavyweight crown to chase Heavyweight glory – saw Tom matched with Jack Sharkey, with the winner to challenge Gene Tunney for the World Heavyweight crown.

While Sharkey and the Kiwi pugilist battled to a draw, promoter George L “Tex” Rickard saw Heeney as a better drawcard, with Sharkey having previously been defeated by Jack Dempsey.

Rickard was the first to promote a million dollar gate and one could be forgiven for thinking that current day promoter Don King, had read and learnt from Rickard, whose most common description was of a scoundrel.

George Lewis “Tex” Rickard could have been a character out of a Jack London novel and it is worth recalling his story. Rickard was born in Kansas City, Missouri and spent his youth in Sherman, Texas where his parents had moved when he was four. At the age of 23 years he was elected sheriff of Henrietta, Texas and acquired the nickname of Tex.

Rickard went to Alaska drawn by the discovery of gold, arriving there in November 1885. On learning of the Klondike Gold Rush of 1887 he couldn't get there fast enough. After selling his and his partners claim for sixty thousand dollars he opened a saloon where he eventually lost everything.



Promoter George L (Tex) Rickard (photo - Wikipedia)

While working as a poker dealer and bartender at the Monte Carlo saloon and gambling hall, he and Wilson Mizner began promoting boxing matches. In 1899 Rickard left for another gold strike in Nome where he first came in contact with Western legend Wyatt Earp. The Western legend had refereed a number of fights, including a Heavyweight title fight between New Zealand's Bob Fitzsimmons and Tom Sharkey in San Francisco in December 1886.

After a sojourn in South America, Rickard secured the rights to promote boxing at Madison Square Gardens in New York City. By 1924 Rickard was putting together the finances to build the New Madison Square Garden's, which were completed in 1925.

During the 1920's, Rickard promoted World Heavyweight Champion Jack Dempsey in association with Dempsey's manager Jack Kearns and grossed over eight million dollars from five fights between 1921 and 1926. They were also responsible for the first live radio broadcast of a title fight and the first Million Dollar gate between Dempsey and George Carpentier in 1921. A key business partner of Rickard's during the period was Jess McMahon who became the grandfather of current WWE head honcho Vince McMahon.

Tunney was guaranteed around half a million dollars with Henney to receive one hundred thousand dollars. In paying such staggering sums Rickard had to make \$850,000 to break even. As the dust settled on the fight, the promoter lost \$152, 750 in spite of attracting a crowd of 45, 890 fight fans.

THE FIGHTING MARINE MEETS THE HARD ROCK FROM DOWN UNDER

At the weigh-in Tunney scaled 13st 10lb with Henney at 14st 7½ lbs.

| | | |
|--------|-----------|-----------|
| | Tunney | Henney |
| Height | 6' 1 ½ | 5' 10 ½ |
| Reach | 77 inches | 72 inches |

As the pre-fight preliminaries were attended to with the fighters in the ring, Tunney was his usual calm unruffled self, with the normally phlegmatic Henney visibly nervous. He sat on his chair in his corner, Maori cloak about his stocky figure, chatting to his seconds and smiling to the crowd, but he was noticeably fidgety and every so often his homely features would take on a grim strained look.

Henney gave Tunney a mild shock when he opened the exchanges, without wasting any time feeling out his opponent. He got home with a couple of lefts and ducked under Tunney's first counter. Tunney seemed "nettled" and lashed out after Henney had hooked him again over the top. Close range punching and clinching and Tunney now and again breaking ground were the features of the first few rounds, though there was something happening all the time. Tunney's counters to the aggressive Henney leads began to come more often and with a degree more accuracy, although he couldn't check Tom's steady pursuit.

It seemed to be in the fourth round that Gene Tunney gradually began to assume command. Missing with two left hands, he landed a hard right to the heart and when Henney hooked him to face in return, Tunney was quickly back with two jabs and a jolting left hook. Henney again forced the champion to retreat with a barrage of swings but they were ineffective blows and Tunney stood in to score with another of the dangerous rights to the heart.

Henney's forward march gave no indication of slowing down and he was back with a right to the jaw, although by the end of the round he was bleeding from the nose and right eye. Tunney was jabbing and hooking accurately with his left to the jaw and every so often stepping in with straight rights to the head and strength sapping rights around the New Zealander's heart.

Henney's very persistence still compelled the American to give ground and once Tom went sprawling when missing with a huge swing. In close, Tunney was smart in checking Henney from using his right, even if sometimes he resorted to straight-out holding to do so. Henney attempted to counter by punching at the muscles of the champions offending arm, at which Tunney protested.

Heeney of course was using a completely lawful counter to Tunney's action – Gene knew that so he appealed to Heeney's generosity. Tunney said "fight clean there Tom" and Heeney, instead of suggesting that Tunney should stop holding merely refrained from hammering on the left arm.



Left -Tom Heeney wearing the Maori Cloak awaiting referee instruction
Right – Gene Tunney v Tom Heeney action (photos from Wikipedia)

In the eighth, Tunney cut loose and for the first time the New Zealand boxer looked in real trouble. Here now was the real Tunney, the man who had checked Dempsey, the fighter who long after his retirement, was to gain recognition as one of the greatest of the heavyweight champions.

Then Tunney shot both hands to the face (of Heeney) and the thumb of his left glove, whether by accident or design went into Heeney's eye. Tom stepped back, bent his head in agony and kept brushing with the back of his glove. Tunney held off for a few minutes, perhaps in contrition but more likely because he was unaware what had happened. He was soon at work again, lashing Heeney's head with every blow he knew – hooks and swings, jolts, uppercuts and jabs. Heeney close to helplessness, tried to fight back but couldn't see where Tunney was and only pawed the air.

Few people realized precisely what had happened. They saw Tunney sending over apparent knockout blows by the dozen and Heeney still standing up and fighting back. They marveled at the "Hard Rocks" courage and durability and cheered him to the echo as the bell ended an unhappy round for him.

The issue was now beyond doubt. Tunney knew that he had gone more than half-way to victory and came out thereafter to chop down this annoying persistent foreigner. He kept shooting at the eyes and driving that dreadful right into the heart. Heeney tougher than a month-old steak, fought back like a cornered wolf. He had to clinch often now – his face was streaming with blood from cuts to the brow and cheekbones, but this wonderfully gallant man kept going forward through it all.

Near the ropes towards the conclusion of the tenth round, Gene Tunney struck the blow that sewed up the fight for him and enabled him to retire the following week with an unblemished record. As Heeney groped his way inside, Tunney smashed across a murderous right to the head that felled Tom as if he had been poleaxed. The bell rang shortly afterwards with Heeney half out on the ring apron and with little chance it seemed of regaining the perpendicular within ten or even twenty seconds.

Heeney came out for certain execution in round eleven, but although Tunney was throwing punch after punch at him, Tom got through with a hard left swing to the head. This was his final effort of any account – Tunney was hitting him at will, though still unable to lower him, when the referee moved in and ended it all with eight seconds of the round remaining. Blind and helpless, Tom had only his big pumpkin of a heart left.

“Heeney is a game one” Tunney said later “Indeed I have never fought a fighter more game. I pounded enough rights to drop an ox, yet he came on for more”. “He never stops fighting and takes ever thing that you hand him”.

Heeney himself, in the manner of so many game uns (ones) who are sent to the corner for their own good, felt positive that he could have lasted the 15-round limit. “I was bleeding from the nose, but still felt strong enough to continue and still felt that I might have brought the champion down with one of my punches”.

Tunney retired a few weeks after beating Heeney. The Kiwi challenger boxed around the States and Canada for another five years but his star quickly waned and he became regarded nothing more than a “trial horse” for rising young heavies.

(Adapted from Brian O’Brien’s “Kiwis With Gloves On”)

PART TWO

GENE TUNNEY MEETS TOM HEENEY (AGAIN)

During World War Two, the two combatants from the World Heavyweight title fight at Yankee Stadium crossed paths on at least one occasion.

Both Gene Tunney and Tom Heeney served in the USA Navy during hostilities. Gene Tunney was appointed as the head of the Naval Physical Fitness program holding the rank of Commander. During his term in the navy, Commander Tunney travelled throughout the Pacific Theatre of War.

Tom Heeney, who had become an American citizen, also joined the USA Navy and served in the Pacific, joining the Naval Civil Engineer Corps, taking time out to coach and referee armed service bouts in the Pacific



Commander Gene Tunney shaping up to naval boxer Jack Ross at Pearl Harbour (Photo – INP)

Armed Service boxing was eagerly awaited by US and other service personnel in the Pacific. A press item titled **SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC** told of a South Pacific Forces Boxing Championships, where 100,000 US Servicemen enjoyed a respite from hostilities, to witness the various rounds of the tournament. 6000 were on hand at Guadalcanal to see Commander Tunney present the medals to the victors.

Commander Tunney arrived in New Zealand during November 1943 and said “he had not seen Tom Heeney from the day of their fight until he visited a South Pacific base a day before coming to New Zealand”. “Tom is doing a monumental job arranging boxing contests on a Saturday night that attracts thousands of spectators. During the week he trains the contestants, matches them up and sometimes climbs into the ring to referee the fights. Gene Tunney went on to say “Tom is a tough hardworking honest fellow. There are no finer men. We used to call him The Rock from Down Under as every time he fought he gave his honest best”.

Trawling through the World-Wide-Web revealed at least one other further meeting between Tunney and Henney during World War Two. Part of the Electronic Text Collection put together by Victoria University in Wellington told the tale of another meeting between Gene Tunney and Tom Heeney at Guadalcanal during Christmas 1943.

“The finals of the South Pacific boxing championships were held during the Christmas period and most of us were present at the recreation centre (American) on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas Night to see the finals”. “Tom Heeney, New Zealand’s challenger for the world heavyweight title some years ago refereed the bouts. Gene Tunney ex world heavyweight champion, presented the winners who were mostly Americans, with medals which had been donated by leading American film stars”.

Also in the piece was the menu served to the troops on Christmas Day 1943. It is interesting to note that cigars were served after Dinner. Also noted was the allowance of ten pint bottles of beer given to each man from Squadron funds.

**Christmas Day 1943 – South West Pacific
3rd New Zealand Division Tank Squadron GP**

Dinner

Grapefruit Juice

Roast Turkey seasoned with Cranbury Sauce
Mashed Potatoes, Cabbage, Green Peas

Fruit Salad and Cream
Steamed Christmas Pudding and Vanilla Custard
Coffee, Tea
Candy, Raisins, Cigars

Tea

Cold Roast Turkey, Cold Roast Lamb
Pickles, Beetroot

Peaches, Pears, Pineapple
Candy, Fruit Cake, Raisins
Tea, Fruit Juice

GENE TUNNEY VISITS NEW ZEALAND

The (Wellington) Evening Post reported that Commander Tunney arrived in Auckland on the 8th November 1943. The purpose of the visit was to inspect the American Navy physical training program in New Zealand. The American boxing icon also met with local dignitaries in Auckland and Wellington during his visit.

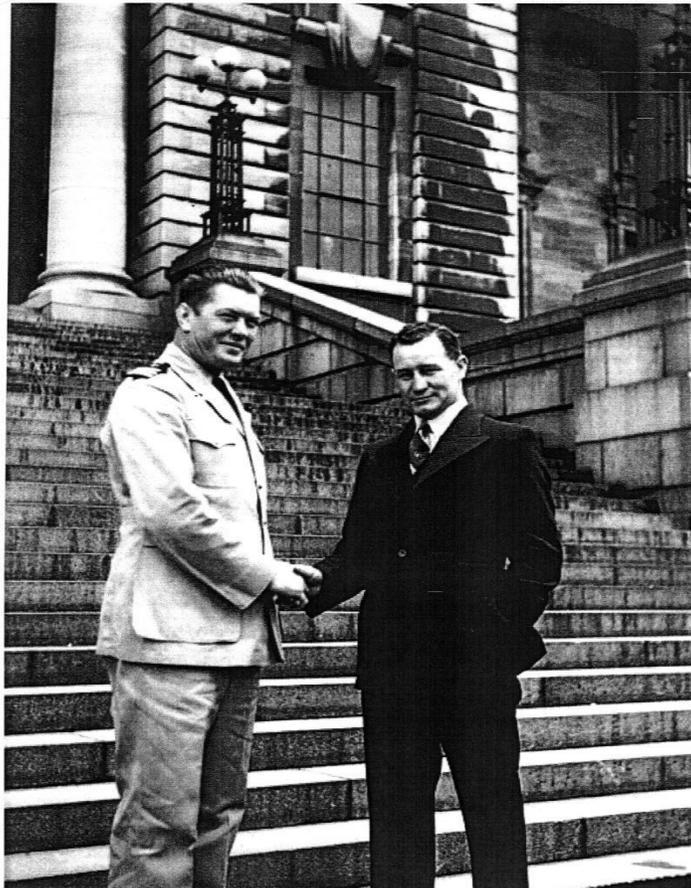


Commander Tunney meeting the Auckland Town Clerk, Mr. J. Mellin, and Members of the Committee of the A.R.A.
(Photo courtesy of Dave Cameron)



Commander Tunney meeting Auckland school boys
(Photo courtesy of Dave Cameron)

**THE 1928 WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION MEETS THE 1928
OLYMPIC WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPION**



(Photograph courtesy of the Ted Morgan Family)

During the visit to Wellington Commander Tunney was accorded a State Reception at Parliament Buildings. The 1928 World Heavyweight Champion had a historic meeting with Ted Morgan who won the 1928 Olympic Welterweight Gold Medal. The photograph above was taken on the steps of the New Zealand Parliament.

WHO'S WHO OF NEW ZEALAND BOXING GATHER ON THE STEPS OF PARLIAMENT TO MEET GENE TUNNEY

During his visit to Wellington Gene Tunney met and was photographed with a number of notable New Zealand boxers and officials.



Front Row Phin Stone, Maurice Strickland, Gene Tunney, Brian McCleary, Ted Morgan, Hughie Sheridan

Back Row includes Alan Maxwell, Tommy Dunn, Tim Tracey, Johnny Leckie, Dick Meale, Neville Mudgeway, Geoff Watchhorn
(Photo courtesy of Dave Cameron)

Pen Portraits of the boxers and officials that Gene Tunney met on the steps of Parliament.

Phin Stone

Long time Wellington Referee and Judge, which included 67 professional contests from 1939 to 1961, when Eddie Cotton defeated Mike Holt at Athletic Park in Wellington. Refereed the Commonwealth title bout at the Basin Reserve during 1954, when Barry Brown beat South African Gerald Dreyer for the Commonwealth Middleweight crown. Was in charge of numerous New Zealand title fights.

Morris Strickland

Morris (correct spelling) Strickland won the New Zealand Heavyweight title in 1932 before turning to the paid ranks. While not as well known as Tom Heeney, he was ranked as high as number six in the World Professional Heavyweight rankings during the late 1930s.

Brian McCleary

New Zealand Amateur Heavyweight champion 1920/21. New Zealand Professional Light Heavyweight title-holder 1923 and New Zealand Heavyweight champion 1922/23. *Kiwis With Gloves On* tells us that McCleary was technically one of the best equipped big men the sport has produced. Brian McCleary met Tom Heeney in the ring, when Tom took the New Zealand Heavyweight title from McCleary by way of a 14th round stoppage on the 14th August 1923 in Christchurch.

Brian McCleary was selected as a All Black on the 1924 tour of Great Britain and is one of four New Zealand Amateur Heavyweight title-holders to go on to become All Blacks. The others were Maurice McHugh, Archie McCormick and Kevin Skinner.

Hughie Sheridan

New Zealand Flyweight champion in 1937 and winner of the Jameson Belt. Represented New Zealand at the 1938 Empire Games losing to J Joubert (South Africa) in the first round of competition.

Alan Maxwell

Widely regarded for many years as Mr Boxing in New Zealand. Alan was a boxer, trainer, referee, judge, administrator, author and boxing critic during his lifetime.

Tommy Dunn

Trained by older brother Dick, Tommy Dunn won the 1939 New Zealand Lightweight title in Invercargill. Dunn and 1939 Middleweight titleholder Bill Enright were nominated by the New Zealand Boxing Association for the 1940 Olympic Games (that were never held because of WW2). After serving in WW2 Tommy commenced a professional career in 1945, winning five from nine fights. His most notable opponents were Bos Murphy and Vic Caltaux.

Johnny Leckie

Johnny Leckie won the 1923 Amateur Flyweight and Featherweight crowns and during 1927/29 and 1931/33 held the countries Professional Featherweight crown. Leckie will be forever remembered for a series of fights against American Pete Sarron and the Fighting Fireman Tommy Donovan who hailed from Waitara. The South Island pugilist, beat Sarron in Sydney in 1929, before losing to the American in four subsequent fights. Sarron was from the top drawer of American fighters to come down under, going on to win the World Featherweight title.

Johnny Leckie and Tommy Donovan went to war in the ring on six occasions. While Donovan beat Pete Sarron on the three occasions that they met, including in front of a New Zealand record crowd of nearly 18,000 spectators at Kilbirnie Speedway in Wellington, he had his hands full each time he squared off with Leckie. The six toe to toe fights between the pair resulted in two wins apiece and two draws.

Dick Meale

New Zealand Amateur Middleweight champion 1921/22. Dick Meale was a long standing professional referee being the third man in the ring on 83 occasions between 1927 and 1941.

Meale returned to coaching after WW2 and was the New Zealand team trainer at the 1950 Auckland Empire Games.

Neville Mudgway

New Zealand Professional Welterweight champion 1935 and 1938/39. Brian O'Brien said that he was a clever ring general and his best fights came at the end of his 29 fight career. In his last five fights he beat Vic Caltaux in Auckland and Wanganui.

Geoff Watchhorn

One of the first decade of New Zealand Boxing Association titleholders, Geoff Watchhorn won the New Zealand Welterweight title in 1909/10 and 1912. In 1910 Watchhorn added the Australasian title to his New Zealand Crown. Geoff Watchhorn is remembered at each New Zealand championships when the winner of the Light Welterweight division is presented with the Watchhorn Belt. He was a former NZBA President and was awarded a life membership.

TED MORGAN – FROM THE BEGINNING

Ted Morgan was trained by Tim Tracy from his very basic gym near the centre of Wellington. In this chapter we recall the contribution that Tim Tracy had on the start of boxing in the country

A native of County Clare, Ireland, where he was born on April 20 1874, Tim Tracy was a two-year-old tot when his parents brought him out to New Zealand. Early in his life Tim was apprenticed to the bootmaking trade and thus began an association with leather, which he later turned to his advantage with leather gloves for the boxing ring.

Always actively interested in boxing but lacking the opportunity to indulge his hobby, Tim had a few lessons from the itinerant Charlie "Darky" Richardson before fitting out his own little gymnasium, at the rear of his bookmakers shop in upper Willis Street, Wellington. In years to come the Tracy gym, which in reality was only a converted room, became a regular meeting place for all of Wellingtons boxing fraternity.

It appeared that Tim Tracy had his first contest with an American named "Kid" Parker in 1904 at the old Exchange building on Lambton Quay. About a year after Tracy's first contest, from which he emerged as the winner, the Wellington Boxing Association wanting to provide the local interest for its inaugural professional contest on 20 September 1905 approached him. The matchmakers agreed that the most suitable way to elevate boxing in the public eye would be to import a boxer of the right type from Australia. The Wellington association wrote to W F Corbett who as "Solar Plexus" was regarded as one of the finest boxing writers in Australia. Corbett was asked to engage for the princely sum of thirty guineas a boxer capable of teaching New Zealand boxers the finer points of the game, while actually engaged in competition.

Corbett lost no time in recommending and engaging George "Hock" Keys, Lightweight champion of New South Wales and later Australia. Keys was a young veteran of twenty five fights and seven years ring experience. The New Zealand association agreed that the Lightweight championship of the colony would be at stake.

The fight was everything that the WBA had hoped for. The patrons who packed the Opera House saw the finest in aggressive boxing of a high technical order from Keys, and spirited resistance from the local man, who was outclassed in the second fight of his career but not put to the sword.

Tim Tracy went on to have some 36 contests until 1915, most of which were for the New Zealand Professional Lightweight championship. In his third contest he defeated ageing Billy “Torpedo” Murphy, who became the only native born World Champion when he beat Ike Weir for the world featherweight title in San Francisco during 1890. The Tracy v Murphy contest was staged in Stratford and Tim stopped Murphy in the fourth round.

Tim Tracy continued to train for many years and became the second President of the New Zealand Boxing Instructors and Trainers Federation, which was formed in 1948.

Legendary New Zealand Trainer Richard (Dick) Dunn introduction to boxing was at the Tim Tracy School of Boxing in Wellington. “When I was around fourteen I was always frequenting the local farrier in Taranaki Street, not far from where I lived. From Taranaki Street you could throw a stone on the roof of all the Wellington boxing champions of that era. The 1920’s were the golden years of New Zealand boxing. Every boy on the street claimed they wanted to be a boxer.”

“After a while the farrier asked me if I wanted to be a boxer? When I replied yes he took me along to Tim Tracy’s gym in Willis street and paid the one and sixpence entrance fee. There was only a rope across the front of the room and three walls. There were about twenty boys there and if you got caught on the walls you had to fight your way out. All Tracy taught was how to win and it was really rough and tough, you had to learn to fight or you wouldn’t survive.”

“He gave the new boys one boxing lesson and then put you in the ring. If he thought you had what it took, you were invited back and it didn’t cost you anything. The next week after my lesson I went back and was put in the ring with Ted Morgan (1928 Olympic Welterweight champion). We all sat on a form against the wall and Tracy would say you and you get in the ring. It wasn’t very scientific boxing that he taught and he was a tough trainer.”

Source “The Story So Far”

OLYMPIC GOLD

The very first New Zealand Olympic Gold Medal was won by Wellington apprentice plumber Edward “Ted” Morgan. Although the Modern Olympics’ were first held in 1896, it wasn’t until 1920 that the black uniform was seen in the arena. While Kiwi Malcolm Champion won our countries first Olympic Gold Medal at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay – he was wearing the uniform of the combined Australasia team

It is doubtful whether the name of New Zealand Boxing ever has stood higher in the eyes of outsiders, than it did in 1928. That was the year in which Heeney fought Tunney for the World Heavyweight title and it was the year that Ted Morgan won an Olympic Gold Medal.

Morgan, Lightweight champion of the Dominion, was half of a two-man New Zealand boxing team chosen for the Amsterdam Olympics. Fellow Wellingtonian Alf Cleverly the Light Heavyweight titleholder was the other. A southpaw, Ted was a protégé of Tim Tracy and was born a year after his venerable mentor's pioneering bout with Hock Keys in 1905.

From the first time that this quietly spoken Wellington College boy first delivered a punch at Tracy's old Willis Street gymnasium, there was no doubting the lad's potential greatness. Unlike the general run of southpaws, Ted plied a good left hand besides the customary "loaded left". It was this ambidexterity of the Wellington boxer which was to prove a big factor in his success. Opponents moving away from the left, were hooked back into line with a stinging right, which was anything but the sloppy pawing thing of so many left-handed pugilists.

When he finally received the nod from the Olympic selectors after winning the National title in 1927, Ted had lost only two of his 24 bouts – to Jack Rodd of Blenheim, who he defeated in each of their other four fights and to Harold Kindly one of the very best of a strong Otago crop.

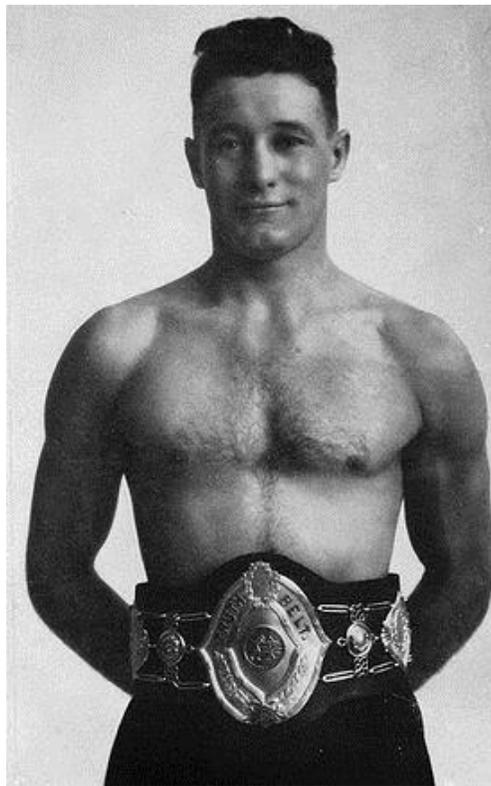


Photo courtesy of Kiwis With Gloves On

On the 3rd June 1928, five weeks after leaving Wellington on board the SS *Remora*, Morgan and Cleverly, along with four swimmers and three track and field athletes berthed at Southampton. But disaster overtook Ted before he even found his land legs. He had dislocated the first knuckle of his left hand, the most potent weapon of a southpaw, in a gymnasium spar.

The injured member subsequently made some response to treatment, although it never completely healed and apart from the anxiety it caused, made the boxers eyes water with pain every time he landed a solid blow with it. A further problem was the increasing poundage, put

on, on the voyage to the Northern Hemisphere which finally forced Morgan into the Welterweight division. There was no Light Welterweight class at the time and although he weighted under 10 stone, he had to compete in a division full of fighters who were strong at around the 10 stone 7lbs Welterweight limit.

But these handicaps only tended to bring out the best in this quiet phlegmatic man who, at least surface wise gave no indication of undue concern. A Swede named Johanson was Morgan's first victim, but it wasn't until he had passed the second hurdle of Frenchman Calataud, that people at home began to envisage a gold medal.

After the win over Calataud a leading journalist at the Games wrote "The best boxer amongst the British Empire contingent is Morgan, the New Zealander. He knows how to use both hands, he hits hard with a minimum of effort and his right bursts holes in the defence of his opponents". "Morgan is one of the best boxer/fighters, if not the best, participating".

And so it was that this 21year old apprentice plumber from Wellington went on to outbox and outfight two more opponents – Canovan from Italy and in the final Landini who was an Argentinean knock-out specialist, to give New Zealand its first Olympic Gold Medal.

Before quitting the Netherlands, Ted received tempting offers from England and the United States to box as a professional. After he returned home from the Games, he turned pro in New Zealand, never living up to the peak of expectation, being continually plagued by the hand injury he suffered on the way to the Olympics.

Ted Morgan later became the proprietor of a thriving little plumbing concern in Wellington and refereed bouts for the Wellington Boxing Association. He died in November 1952 at the early age of forty five. Every year at the Boxing New Zealand National Championships, Ted is remembered, with the presentation of the Ted Morgan Cup to the winner of the Welterweight title. (Adapted from Brian O'Brien's *Kiwis With Gloves On*)

PART THREE

TOM HEENEY COMES HOME FOR THE LAST TIME

Tom married Marion Estelle Dunn at Suffern in New York State on the 2nd August 1928. At the end of August of the same year Tom took his new bride home to New Zealand, where they were welcomed by huge crowds, especially in his home town of Gisborne. On his return to the United States he took out American citizenship.

After retiring from the boxing ring Tom owned a bar in Miami, Florida for many years and it was reported that he often went fishing with his good friend Ernest Hemmingway, the well known author.

Tom returned to New Zealand on several further occasions. In 1969, he was guest of honour at the New Zealand Boxing Association National Championships that were held in Gisborne.

The 57th New Zealand Senior Amateur Boxing Championships were held 22-24 September 1969 at the YMCA Stadium in Gisborne. The Judges were RS Gould, JR Jones, AH Davies, AN Harvey and SM Green with the appointed Referees being MW Sproul, AF Scaife and GR Lyall. The 1969 National Champion Finals Results were as follows

| | Winner | Runner-Up |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Flyweight | Kevin Black (Oamaru) | Stephen Miles (Oamaru) |
| Bantamweight | Pat Ryan (Taranaki) | Michael Wright (Manawatu) |
| Featherweight | Jeff Rackley (Nelson) | Darryl Hammond (Auckland) |
| Lightweight | Brian Kendall (Canterbury) | John Snook (Hawkes Bay) |
| Light Welterweight | Ali Afakasi (Auckland) | Billy Graham (Wellington) |
| Welterweight | Steve Ayerst (Auckland) | Mike Treacy (Hawkes Bay) |
| Light Middleweight | Jack Stewart (Waikato) | Michael Gilmore (Manawatu) |
| Middleweight | Lape Tulisi (Auckland) | Nigel Aitken (Hawkes Bay) |
| Light Heavyweight | Joe Jackson (Auckland) | Ali Fa'aumu (Wellington) |
| Heavyweight | Joe Jackson (Auckland) | Charlie Dunn (Northern Wairoa) |



Tom Heeney with the Southland Boxing team at the 1969 New Zealand Boxing Championships
(Photo courtesy of Peter Fluerty)

The 1960's and 1970's are considered by many to be the golden days of the sport in New Zealand, both in the amateur and professional ranks. It is worth recalling the 1969 National Championships in Gisborne, where Tom Heeney was the star of the show.

Arguably one of the finest boxers to enter the squared ring in New Zealand was Brian Kendall. At the Gisborne National Championships, Brian won his second Lightweight crown when he defeated John Snook from Hawkes Bay.

Brian Kendall retired from the ring with a simply outstanding record of 102 wins from 107 recorded contests. After winning an inaugural junior title in 1962 Kendall burst into the senior ranks in 1963 with the Flyweight championship victory, along with which he was awarded the Bill O'Connor Cup for the youngest senior titleholder. The following year he took out the Bantamweight division.

In 1965 Kendall made the jump into the Featherweight ranks and in doing also won the Jameson Belt, along with the national title. He defended both the title and Jameson belt in 1966 and made a three-peat of the Featherweight crown in 1967. He was the first New Zealand boxer to be awarded the Jameson Belt in successive years. Two successive national Lightweight titles followed in 1968 and 1969. The final Brian Kendall tally of New Zealand Senior Championships was seven, in four weight divisions. A record that is unparalleled is that Brian was never beaten in a New Zealand championship bout. He contested 18 championship bouts winning every single contest.

Another outstanding boxer to win further glory in Gisborne, was Taranaki golden boy Patrick Ryan. Success in the Bantamweight Division, over Michael Wright from Manawatu, was one of Pat's Five New Zealand Senior titles. The Taranaki tyro was trained by older brother Martin, who was also the first trainer of the David and Ron Jackson.

Like a number of the better boxers of the time Pat won several New Zealand junior titles, before making the jump into the senior ranks. Success came in the first attempt on a senior championship with the Flyweight crown in 1968 along with the Bill O'Connor Cup awarded to the youngest titleholder.

After the initial success in 1968, Pat went on in the next three years to add the Bantamweight and Featherweight crowns. The Jameson Belt accompanied the first of his two feather titles in 1970. An Oceania gold medal in 1972, was only the beginning that year, as Pat earned selection for the 1972 Munich Olympics.

Only the truly great boxers can retire and then return to capture another National title. Lured back to the ring in 1977 primarily because the championships were held in Taranaki, Pat added his fifth championship, with victory in the Light Welterweight class. Two memorable contests that the Taranaki terrier will be remembered for are his defeat of Eric Briggs in an outstanding Featherweight final in 1970. As well he convincingly defeated Jeff Rackley over six rounds at Wright Stephenson's thoroughbred sale ring, at Trentham in 1969.

The 1969 Featherweight champion was Jeff Rackley, who beat Darryl Hammond from Auckland who would go on to annex the Lightweight crown at the 1972 Nelson Nationals.

The achievements of the Rackley brothers from Nelson were outstanding. All four brothers were trained by their father Les senior, who was rewarded for his outstanding training achievements, when he was selected to coach the New Zealand boxers at the 1974 Christchurch Commonwealth Games. Amongst the remarkable deeds of Les junior, Jeff, Dean and Peri Rackley, was the selection of all four brothers for either New Zealand Olympic or Commonwealth Games teams.

The first Rackley brother to put his name in the senior championship ledger was Jeff who took the Featherweight title in 1969. The most successful in the number of championship wins of the brothers, he added the Lightweight crown in 1970, Welter in 1971/72 and the Middleweight championship during 1975. The Jameson Belt accompanied the welter titles in 1971/72. Jeff was the only brother not to be selected for a Commonwealth Games team, but went one better with his participation at the ill fated 1972 Munich Olympics. International success included a gold medal at the inaugural Oceania Championships held in Tahiti in 1972.

Joe Jackson achieved a feat that is no longer possible, in winning the Light Heavyweight and Heavyweight titles on the same night. A change was made a numbers of years ago whereby that a boxer could only box in one division at National Championships.

The Auckland boxer defeated Ali Fa'aumu from Wellington earlier in the evening, before re-entering the ring to beat Northland boxer Charlie Dunn in the Heavyweight title decider. Before the rules were changed, Bill Byrne repeated the feat of Joe Jackson three times, winning the Heavyweight and Light Heavyweight titles on the same night in 1972, 1974 and 1975.

Ali Afakasi, who went on to carve out a sterling professional career, defeated Billy Graham in the 1969 Light Welterweight Final. Dave Cameron, in his book "The New Zealand Boxing Scrapbook" said "Talk ring craftsmen and the name Manny Santos is generally the first out of fans of fight fans, but it should be followed very quickly by the name of Ali Afakasi". "A fine (professional) boxer with footwork he used to good effect with extremely fast hands, Afakasi was a stylish counter-attacking welterweight".

Ali Afakasi did what few other kiwi professional boxers – to beat a (future) world champion. Dave Cameron said in his book "Afakasi won his best fight – a 12 round unanimous decision over Rocky Mattioli for the Australasian Welterweight crown". "To understand Mattioli's quality, it needs to be said that he fought 73 times, against good opposition, for only seven losses and that he won the World Light Middleweight title some two years later, knocking out Germany's Eckhard Dage in the fifth".

Jeff Rackley won the Jameson Belt after triumphing in the Featherweight division at the 1969 New Zealand Boxing Championships, with Tom Heeney paying attentive attention. Rackely also annexed the Bill O'Connor Cup presented to the youngest senior titleholder.

Billy Graham who was runner-up to Ali Afakasi in Gisborne holds a unique place in Boxing New Zealand history. The popular Hutt Valley boxer was another protégé of Dick Dunn and like

Brian Maunsell won the Light Welter crown four times. Billy has a unique place in New Zealand boxing history as the only boxer to win the Jameson Belt, Bill O'Connor Cup for the youngest senior titleholder and the Parker Memorial Trophy as the best loser, during his career.