

Sept 23, 1962

# Greg's Gossip

By L. H. Gregory

Sports Editor, The Oregonian

It was a very brief item, only one paragraph long and half-buried at the bottom of an inside page, that told of the death in Coos Bay of "Nig" Yeager, one-time fighting pride of the old Albina section of east Portland. However, it triggered recollections of a day when John Adam (Nig) Yeager from that fight-loving area which turned out so many good fighters in its time, not only was king-fighter of them all but for a brief period the most exciting ring man Portland has ever known. The "John Adam" mentioned above would have been superfluous at that time. No one knew he had any other first name than "Nig," nor cared. As "Nig" Yeager he lived, fought, reached a peak high in the boxing sunlight, then had his wings singed and as suddenly as he rose plunged into boxing obscurity again; and it was as "Nig" Yeager that his death was announced.



JOHN ADAM (NIG) YEAGER

Albina's fighting idol of 1920s

Yeager wasn't the scientific best of Albina's many good fighters, but certainly the most dramatic and spectacular, a heavyweight with a punch; other Albina fighters were smaller men. He not only could punch but could take a knock-down himself and still get up and fight some more, and these are among the elements of boxing popularity. The odd thing is that he rose from nowhere, an absolute unknown in the boxing game, into that sudden period of bright splendor, in which he packed in and stirred the fiery enthusiasm of the customers as no other Portland fighter ever did. He fought just 15 times. Of the first 14, all but four were knockout victories. Then came ill-advised No. 15 against too good and experienced a man and curtains!

Yeager's day was so short that for aid in remembering back we asked Capt. Harry Hansen, boxing matchmaker at the time to review what he himself recalled. Even Cap

(Continued On Page 3, Col. 1)

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(Continued From Page 1)

didn't remember it all, but between the two of us it's quite a story.

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"This was in the early 1920s," Capt. Hansen said. "We were looking for a good local card. A boxing commission member, the late Dr. Tom Ross, got excited about a fellow in Albina named Nig Yeager. He wasn't too definite as to who Yeager was, couldn't point to a record for him, had never seen him fight, but Albina friends had told him about the lad. I as matchmaker had never heard of Yeager, nor had any of the boxing managers about the gyms, but in response to Doc's wishes I put him on in a four-round curtain raiser — and he got stage fright and didn't show up! Eventually I did get him in against a Bill Bletch. Both were still living after four of the wildest rounds I ever saw and the referee raised Yeager's hand. That introduction made him a card.

"I put him on in four six-round 'specials' and he bludgeoned his way through them all, of 10 taking knockdowns himself, to knockout victories, so I got him a main event against Joe Martinson from Tacoma. Even in the prelims he was drawing enthusiastic houses. This one was still bigger. One or the other was on the floor in virtually every round, but in the fifth Martinson went down again and couldn't get up. This fight 'made' Yeager as a main eventer. For his next I matched him with a Bremerton marine named Welch — another tremendous fight, Yeager winning the decision. This and the original curtain raiser were the only ones of his first seven fights to go the limit.

"We put him in several more times, Yeager always dramatically delivering with kayos. His Albina partisans were absolutely daffy about him. Portland as a whole got the fever and thronged out to see him fight. He had a

peculiar style. He'd stand straight up in mid-ring, right hand cocked, and take punches until he saw an opening. Then straight and true that right would snap out, and it was lethal. Odd, that with no real boxing science, he should have been a straight, not a round-house or 'swing' puncher.

"Boxing commissions are funny. We were earning money on Yeager, but the commission members began demanding better opponents for him not the public but the commissioner. So finally I got the old Tacoma trial horse, Frank Farmer who would fight a threshing machine if he liked the purse. So was to be a double-main, with Jimmy Sacco and Johnny Trambitas in the first 10. I told Farmer I'd pay him \$600, same as the other principals, but he demanded \$800 and refused—which was a mistake—15 per cent.

"Farmer got his \$800 when Yeager's manager, Henry Crieger, also of Albina, 'bought the house' for 51½ percent paying all the fighters and taking the balance. So many turned out for that one that they lined up a block each way from the entrance, and fully 1,000, perhaps more, couldn't get in at all! Some enthusiasts even climbed to the roof and peeked through the sky light. The balcony was sold out at 4:30 that afternoon. My recollection is that the house scaled \$10,000 an extremely capacity top. Farmer had outsmarted himself again for Krieger's percentage brought Yeager about \$2,500

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