

*Australian Star*  
December 28, 1908

*In a Modern Stadium*

*The Negro's Smile*

*Story of a Big Fight*

Full credit for the big fight must be given H. D. McIntosh, who has done the unprecedented. Equal credit, however, must be given to Australia, for without her splendid sport-loving men not a hundred McIntoshes would have pulled off the great contest on Saturday.

The Stadium is a magnificent arena, and so was the crowd magnificent, which was managed by that happy aptitude which the English have for handling big crowds. The spirit of the Stadium crowd inside and out, with its fair-mindedness and sporting squareness, was a joy to behold. It was hard to realize that those fifty or sixty thousand men were descended from generations that attended old bare-knuckle fights in England, where partisan crowds jammed the ringside, slugging each other, smashing the top hats of gentlemen, promoters, and backers, and swatting away with clubs at the heads of the poor devils of fighters whenever they came near to the ropes.

Never in my life have I seen a finer, fairer, more orderly ringside crowd, and in this connection it must be remembered that the majority were in favor of the man who was losing. That many thousand men could sit quietly for forty minutes and watch their chosen champion hopelessly and remorselessly beaten down, and not make the slightest demonstration, is a remarkable display of inhibition.

There is no use minimizing Johnson's victory in order to soothe Burns's feelings. It is part of the game to take punishment in the ring, and it is just as much part of the game to take unbiased criticism afterwards in the columns of the Press. Personally I was with Burns all the way. He is a white man, and so am I. Naturally I wanted to see the white man win. Put the case to Johnson and ask him if he were the spectator at a fight between a white man and a black man which he would like to see win. Johnson's black skin will dictate a desire parallel to the one dictated by my white skin.

Now, to come back to the point. There is no foolish sentimental need to gloss over Burns's defeat. Because a white man wishes a white man to win, this should not prevent him from giving absolute credit to the best man who did win, even when I that best man was black. All hail to Johnson. His victory was unqualified. It was his fight all the way through, in spite of published accounts to the contrary, one of which out of the first six rounds gives two rounds to Burns, two to Johnson, and two with the honors evenly divided. In spite of much mistaken partisanship, it must be acknowledged by every man at the ringside that there was never a round that was Burns's and never a round with even honors.

Burns was a little man against a big man, a clever man against a cleverer man, a quick man against a quicker man, and a gritty, gamey man all the way through. But, alas! men are not

born equal, and neither are pugilists. If grit and gameness should win by decree or natural law then Burns, I dare to say, would have won on Saturday, and in a thousand additional fights with Johnson he would win, but, unfortunately for Burns, what did win on Saturday was bigness, coolness, quickness, cleverness, and vast physical superiority.

From any standpoint the fight between Cripps and Griffin last Wednesday night was a far better contest. The men were evenly matched, and the result was in doubt from round to round and moment to moment, and this delicate balance was due to their being equally matched. Each man had opportunity to show the best that was in him. That opportunity was denied Burns.

Bear with me for a moment. I often put on gloves myself, and take my word for it I am really delightfully clever when my opponent is a couple of stone lighter than I am, half a foot or so shorter, and about half as strong. On such occasion I can show what I've got in me, and I can smile all the time, scintillate brilliant repartee and dazzling persiflage, and, in the clinches, talk over the political situation and the Broken Hill trouble with the audience. But, heavens! suppose I were to don gloves with Burns. I could no more show what I had in me than Burns showed against Johnson. That is the whole fight in a nutshell. The men were so unevenly matched that Burns was barred from showing anything he had in him, with the exception of pluck. Johnson was too big, too strong, too clever. Burns never had a show, he was hopelessly outclassed, and I am confident that had a man from Mars been present at the ringside witnessing his first fight, he would have demanded to know why Burns was ever in the ring at all.

It's hard to talk, Tommy, but it is no harder than those wallops you received on Saturday, and it is just as true that it is no dishonor to be beaten in fair fight. You did your topmost best, and there's my hand on it, and on all your pluck, grit, and endurance.

Jack Johnson, here's my hand, too. I wanted to see the other fellow win, but you were the best man. Shake.

"Stop the fight?" The word is a misnomer; there was no fight. No Armenian massacre would compare with the hopeless slaughter that took place in the Stadium. It was not a case of "too much Johnson," but of "all Johnson." A golden smile tells the story, and that golden smile was Johnson's. The fight—if fight it can be called—was like unto that between a Colossus and a toy automaton. It had all the seeming of a playful Ethiopian at loggerheads with a small and futile white man, of a grown man cuffing a naughty child, of a monologue by one Johnson, who made noise with his fist like a lullaby, tucking one Burns into his little crib in Sleepy Hollow; of a funeral with Burns for the late deceased and Johnson for undertaker, grave-digger, and sexton.

Twenty thousand men were at the ringside, and twice twenty thousand lingered outside. Johnson, first at the ring, showed in magnificent condition. When he smiled a dazzling flash of gold filled the wide aperture between his open lips, and he smiled all the time. He had not a trouble in the world. When asked what he was going to do after the fight, he said he was going to the races. It was a happy prophecy.

He was immediately followed into the ring by Burns, who had no smile whatever. He looked pale and sallow, as if he had not slept all night, or as if he had just pulled through a bout with fever. He received a heartier greeting than Johnson, and was favorite with the crowd.

It promised to be a bitter fight. There was no chivalry nor good will in it, and Johnson, despite his care-free pose, had an eye to instant need of things. He sent his seconds insistently into Burns's corner to watch the putting on of the gloves, for fear a casual horseshoe might stray in. He examined personally Burns's belt, and announced flatly that he would not fight if Burns did not remove the tape from his skinned elbows.

“Nothing doing till he takes ’em off,” quoth Johnson. The crowd hooted but Johnson smiled his happy, golden smile and dreamed with Ethiopian stolidness in his corner. Burns took off the offending tapes and was applauded uproariously. Johnson stood up and was hooted. He merely smiled. That is the fight epitomized—Johnson’s smile.

The gong sounded and the fight and monologue began. “All right, Tommy,” said Johnson, with exaggerated English accent, and thereafter he talked throughout the fight when he was not smiling.

Scarcely had they mixed when he caught his antagonist with a fierce upper-cut, turning him completely over in the air and landing him on his back. There is no use giving details. There was no doubt, from the moment of the opening of the first round, the affair was too one-sided. There was never so one-sided a world’s championship in the history of the ring. It was not a case of a man being put out by a clever or lucky punch in the first or second round; it was a case of a plucky, determined fighter who had no chance for a look in at any single instant of the fight. There was no fraction of a second in all fourteen rounds that could be called Burns’s. So far as damage is concerned Burns never landed a blow, he never grazed the black man.

It was not Burns’s fault, however. He tried every moment throughout the fight, except when he was groggy. It was hopeless, preposterous, heroic. He was a glutton for punishment, and he bored in all the time, but a dewdrop in Sheol had more chance than did he with the giant Ethiopian. In all justice it must be urged that Burns had no opportunity to show what he had in him. Johnson was too big, too able, too clever, too superb. He was impregnable. His long arms, his height, his cool-seeing eyes, his timing and distancing, his footwork, his blocking and locking, and his splendid out-sparring and equally splendid in-fighting, kept Burns in trouble all the time. At no stage of the fight was either man extended. Johnson was just as inaccessible as Mont Blanc, and against such a mountain what possible chance had Burns to extend himself? He was smothered all the time.

As for Johnson, he did not have to extend. He cuffed and smiled and smiled and cuffed, and in clinches whirled his opponent around so as to be able to assume a beatific and angelic facial expression for the benefit of the cinematograph machines. Burns never struck a body blow that would compare with Johnson’s, nor a cross nor straight nor upper cut; while as for kidney blows, Johnson’s most frivolous and pensive taps were like thunderbolts as measured against Burns’s butterfly flutterings in that painful locality.

Johnson frivelled with Burns throughout the fight. He refused to take Burns seriously, and with creditable histrionic ability played the part of a gentle schoolmaster administering benevolent chastisement to a rude and fractious urchin.

The “mouth fighting” on the part of both men must have seemed bizarre to the Australian audience; nevertheless, mouth fighting as a ring tactic has won more than one battle, but on Saturday it neither won nor lost anything. Burns’s remarks failed to ruffle his opponent’s complacency in the slightest, while there was no need for Johnson’s airy verbal irritations, for Burns was as angry as could be from the stroke of the gong, and though Johnson proved a past master in the art of mouth fighting, even his pre-eminent ability in that direction failed to make Burns angrier by one jot or tittle.

There was, however, one result from word sparring, an unfortunate result to Burns. He was fighting desperately and his last hope lay in making the big negro lose his head; instead he nearly lost his own by having it punched off. Not that he irritated Johnson in the least by what he said. Far from it. Johnson never ceased smiling when the uncomplimentary remarks were addressed to him, nor did he cease smiling as he proceeded to wallop the naughty boy for his

impertinence, but wallop him he did, in so smiling and summary a fashion as to take the steam out of Burns's verbal punches. In fact, after two distinct adventures of this sort Burns concluded that that tactic was too disastrous and abandoned it.

Not Bums, but Johnson did the in-fighting; in fact, the major portion of the punishment he delivered was in clinches. At times he would hold up his arms to show he was no party to the clinch. Again, he would deliberately and by apparently no exertion of strength, thrust Bums away and clear of him, and yet again he would thrust Burns partially clear with one hand, and upper-cut him to the face with the other; and when Bums instantly fell forward into another clinch, thrust him partially clear and repeat the upper-cut. Once he did this five times in succession, as fast as a man could count, each upper-cut connecting and counting savagely. But principally in clinches Johnson rested, smiled, dreamed. This dreaming expression was fascinating, it teemed almost a trance. It was certainly deceptive, for suddenly the lines of the face would harden, the eyes glint viciously, and Bums would be frightfully hooked, swung, and upper-cut for a bad half minute; then the smile and dreamy trance would return as Bums effected another clinch.

At times, too, when both men were set, Johnson would deliberately assume the fierce, vicious, intent expression, only apparently for the purpose of suddenly relaxing and letting his teeth flash forth like the rise of a harvest moon, while his face beamed with all the happy, care-free innocence of a little child, Johnson play-acted all the time. His part was the clown, and he played with Burns from the gong of the opening round to the finish of the fight. Burns was a toy in his hands. For Johnson it was a kindergarten romp. "Hit here, Tahmy," he would say, exposing the right side of his unprotected stomach, and when Burns struck Johnson would neither wince nor cover up. Instead, he would receive the blow with a happy, careless smile directed to the audience, turn the left side of his unprotected stomach, and say, "Now here, Tahmy," and while Bums hit as directed, Johnson would continue to grin and chuckle and smile his golden smile.

One criticism, and only one, can be passed upon Johnson. In the thirteenth round he made the mistake of his life. He should have put Bums out. He could have put him out; it would have been child's play. Instead of which he smiled and deliberately let Bums live until the gong sounded, and in the opening of the fourteenth round the police stopped the fight and Johnson lost the credit of a knock-out.

But one thing remains. Jeffries must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that smile from Johnson's face. "Jeff, it's up to you, and, McIntosh, it's up to you to get the fight for Australia. Both you and Australia certainly deserve it"