



# CHARLEY MURRAY

PROMOTER — 1900-1950

Nobody is absolutely certain when Charley Murray was born, but our best guess would be that it was either 1884 or 1885. You see Charley never revealed his age. He promoted his first boxing match at the age of 16 in 1900. During the next 50 years he promoted wrestling, tennis, both college and professional football, bicycle racing, motor cycle racing, auto racing, harness racing, marathon racing events as well as hundred of boxing cards. His career was so comprehensive, extensive and successful that the *Buffalo Courier Express* commented at the time of his death that Murray was the, "Premier Buffalo Sports promoter and one of the most fabulous sports figures in the US in the first half of the century."

Charley Murray was a close friend of George Halas, Art Rooney, Bert Bell and the Mara Family. Using these connections Murray was able to bring NFL games to Buffalo in the later 1930's and early 1940's. He was hoping that Buffalo's support for these games would result in a NFL franchise for Buffalo. According to his friends in the league, the

only way that this would come to fruition would be if Murray agreed to assume the role of team president. His other obligations prevented him from accepting this offer. Less than a decade later he returned to the football arena again. He was part of the local delegation that traveled to Philadelphia in late 1949 to meet with Bert Bell and the other NFL leaders to plead for a franchise in the newly formed National-American Football League (the very temporary name of the NFL). The ill-fated plan broke Murray's spirits and probably hastened his death on March 22, 1950.

Murray's final promotional was a pro tennis show on December 8, 1949. He first successfully promoted tennis tournaments in the 1920's. His circle of friends included tennis legend Bill Tilden. He was one of the few promoters to be able to put up with "Big Bill's" temperamental disposition. Tilden made two visits to Buffalo in the 1920's. Murray's final out of town promotion took him to New York City. He had achieved great success with the roller derby in Buffalo, while others had failed in a similar venture in New York City. Murray was called to New York City where he immediately achieved success. Soon after that the roller derby craze reached television.

It was in boxing, however, that he achieved his greatest success. At the same time he was a sports reporter at the turn of the century with the *Buffalo Enquirer*, sports editor with the *Buffalo Commercial* from 1908-23 and a reporter with the *Buffalo Times* in the 1930's. He was a close personal friend of Jack Dempsey and his constant companion prior to the Dempsey-Firpo fight. Murray was also at ringside for both Dempsey-Tunney fights. It was Murray that first noticed the discrepancy in the count after Dempsey failed to go to a neutral corner after sending Tunney to the canvas. In fact Murray coined the phrase "The Long Count." It was this close friendship with Dempsey that brought the "Manassa Mauler" to Buffalo in the 1920's for three fights and a series of exhibitions at the Loew's Theater against a young Lou Scozza. Murray did fail in his attempt to land the 1920 championship fight between Dempsey and Bill Brennan. The fight was held in New York City.

Paul "Red" Can was a boxing manager and long-time matchmaker for Charley and Billy Kelly at the Queensbury A.C. Jimmy Slattery would become their "meal ticket" in the late 1920's as all of his local fights but one were promoted by Murray. The Velodrome Club headed by Eddie Tranter, Bob Stedler and Al Murphy and Grant Quale's and Hugh Shannon's Crescent Sporting Club formed the competition. In a very unusual venture Murray, Quale and Shannon co-promoted the Jimmy Slattery -- Lou Scozza Light-heavyweight title fight on February 10, 1930.

Murray's connections with major boxing promoters around the nation like Tex Rickard provided Slattery and later Benny Ross entrance to the national boxing scene. Fights with such boxing legends like Paul Berlenbach, Tommy Loughran, Maxie Rosenbloom, Tiger Flowers and Young Stribling were made possible by these connections. Once again Murray did not achieve complete success. In 1924 he offered Georges Carpentier a \$30,000 guarantee to fight Jimmy Slattery in Buffalo. Fifteen years later he offered a \$5,000 guarantee to Joey Archibald to defend his recently won Featherweight title in Buffalo against Jimmy Gilligan. Neither fight was held.

For fifty years Charley Murray was the most popular figure in Buffalo's sports scene.