

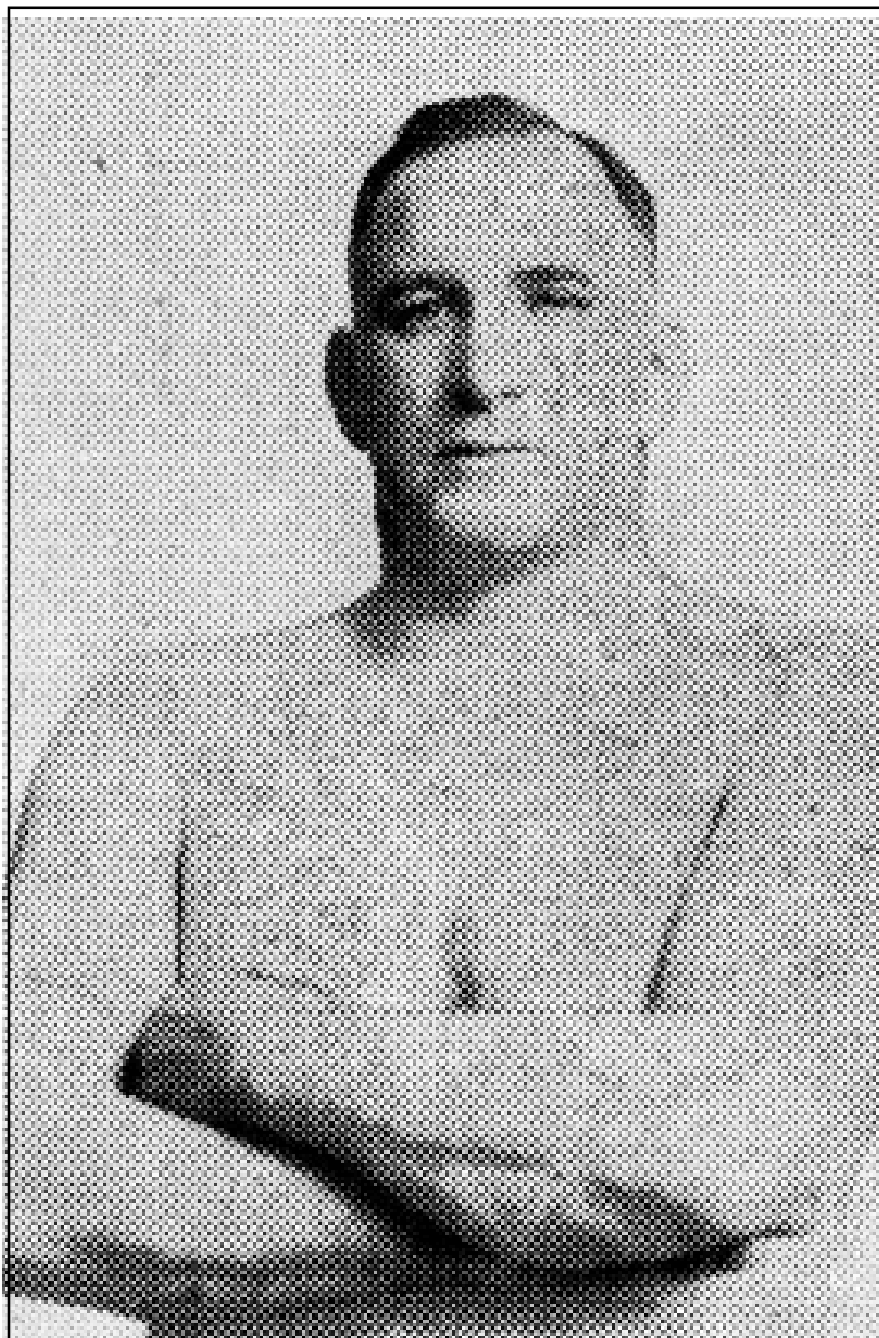
# Search for a Champion

## Allan Best

The new all-in wrestling of the 1930's had a surfeit of champions. Each and every promoter advertised his biggest money-spinner as champion of this or that. There were, of course, a few deserving considerations for the title but in the real world there could only be one champion.

A sporting paper of the time decided it would sort out who was king of the heavyweights, the only weight class that seemed to matter at the time. The records of the best on offer were scrutinised and a decision made as to who was to be the British Heavyweight Champion. Of course it made little difference, as promoters carried on regardless, styling their own best attractions as "Champion".

The first proposed for the title was the Huddersfield wrestler Douglas Clark, "John Bull in trunks". Clark was indeed a "real" wrestler, but at that time most of the wrestlers were "real" having for the most part been in the business prior to the all-in era when there was little glamour and a lot of hard knocks. It was the time of the fairground challenges when a lad really had to be able to take care of himself. Clark had held what was - and probably still is - the only professional World's Championship in wrestling at that time. He had won the World's Heavyweight Cumberland and West-

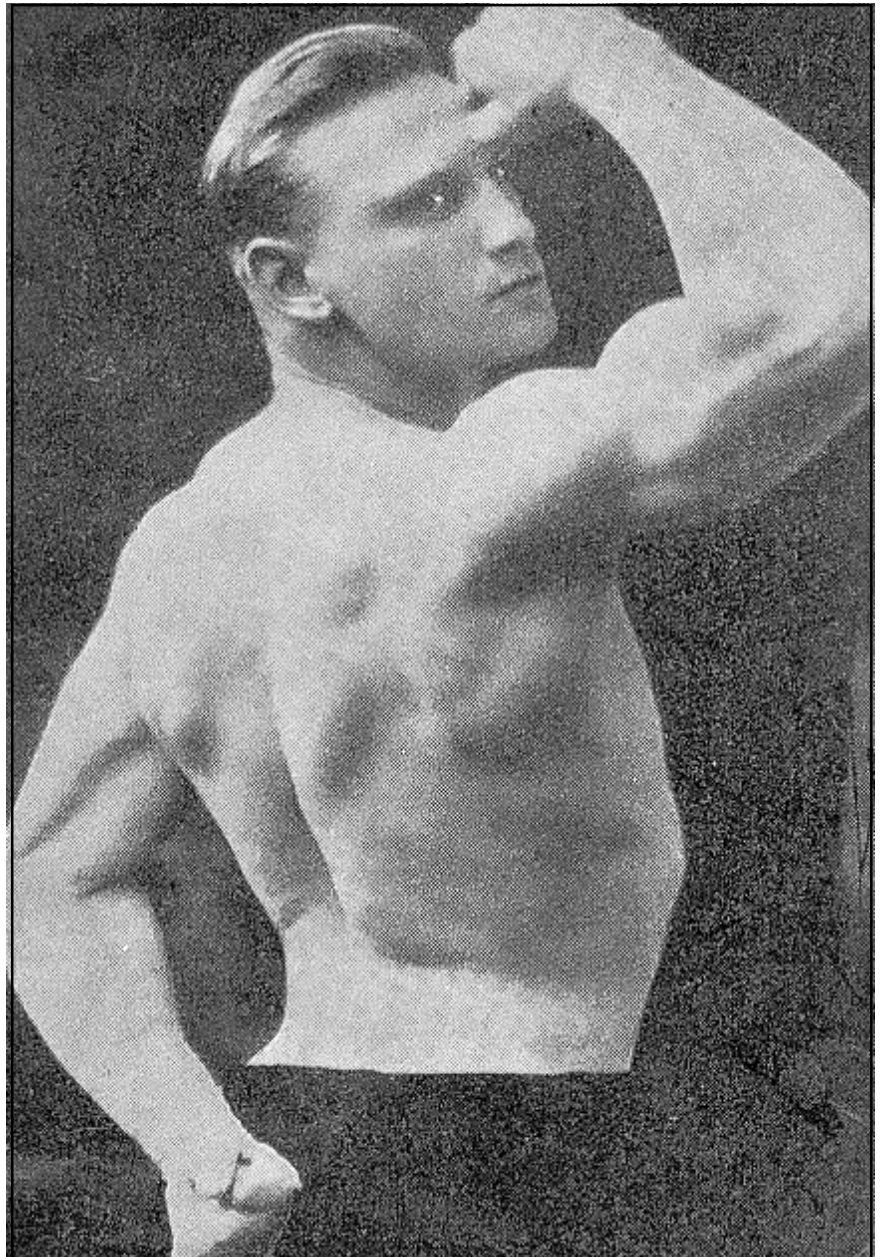


**DOUG CLARKE**

moreland title three times and the Grasmere title five times. Whilst this is not a full indication of Clark's prowess as a catch wrestler it does give some indication of his athleticism. His ring record

strengthened his case for consideration. In 1931 at Lane's Club in London, Clark defeated Atholl Oakley in the finals of the Catch-as-catch can championships and, as Oakley claimed the title at

the time it should have followed the Clark was now champion. Atholl toured the USA after that defeat still styling himself British Heavyweight Champion. When challenged, Oakley stated he had been defeated in the catch style whereas he was undefeated in the all-in style. In 1934 at the White City Stadium "Bulldog" Bill Gannon beat Oakley for the all-in title. Later that year in the Belle Vue Stadium, Manchester Clark defeated Gannon. This victory should have consolidated Clark's claim to the title, but not a bit of it. Rival promoters ignored hard evidence in favour of fantasy. Not in the least fazed by being ignored by the magazine, adamant that Clark was Champion, a list of contenders was drawn up. Top of the list was George Boganski, though given his history it is unclear by what convolutions of logic the scribe arrived at the conclusion that Boganski was British. Born in Odessa in Southern Russia, George learned his wrestling at high school where he was an outstanding performer. To earn a living he travelled to Australia with a dance troop (what else?) and was stranded there when the First World War broke out. There being little demand for dancers during a major war (especially in Australia) George took up engineering. At the cessation of hostilities he turned to professional wrestling (as you would). Such was Boganski's reputation that he was invited to



**GEORGE BOGANSKI**

South Africa to wrestle that pioneer of all-in, Henry Irslinger. In 1929, George became a British subject on the grounds that he had lived a long time in the Colonies. I'll bet Immigration were happy with that. Irslinger was one of the group that had introduced all-in to this country, so it is possible that his influence brought Boganski

to the forefront on his arrival here.

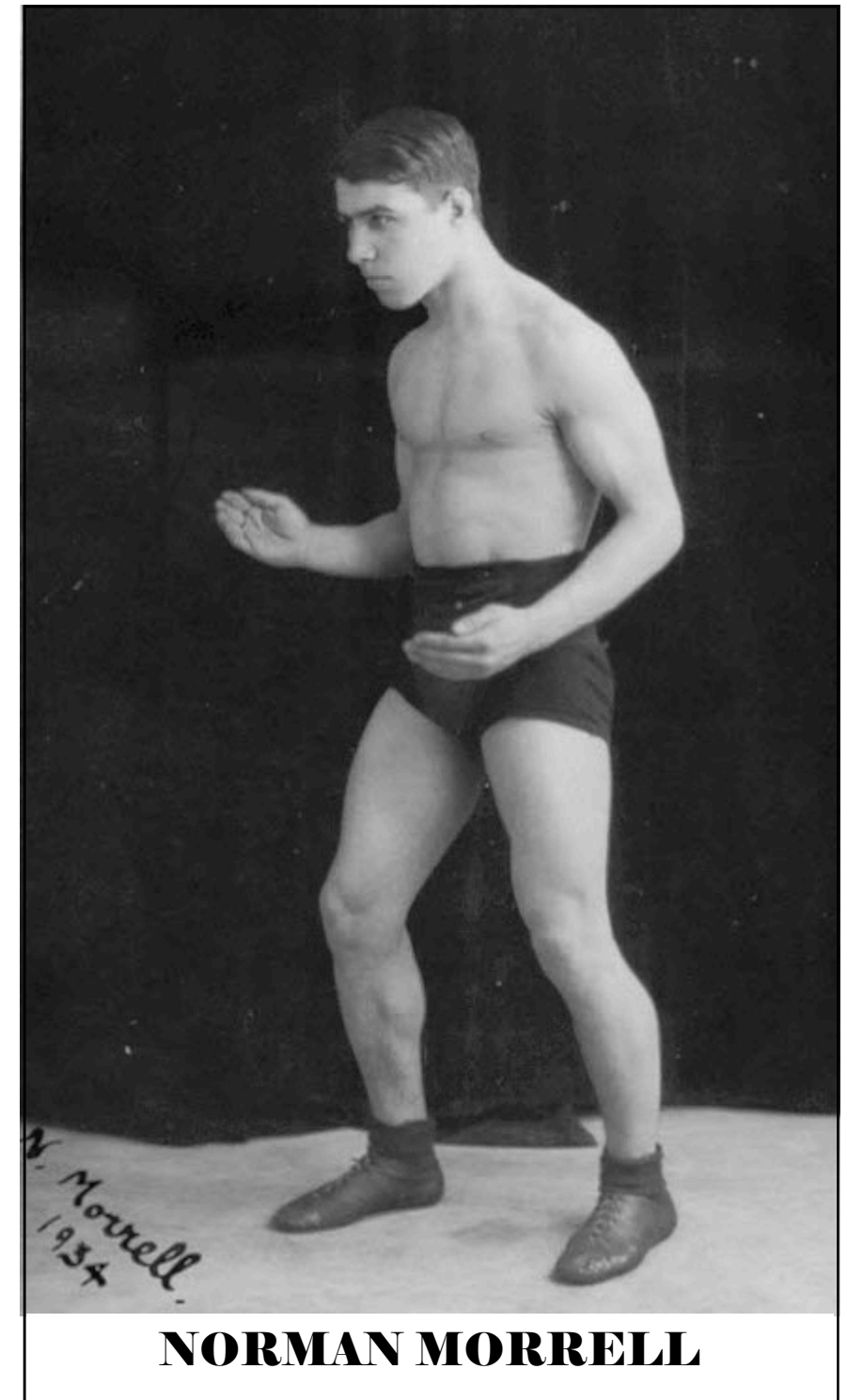
After his stay in Britain, Boganski returned to South Africa where he won the National Championship and, on his return to this country he beat a string of top men including De Groot of Belgium, Gaston Gaveart of France and Serge Kalmakoff, the American star.

George Boganski was not a

big man, fourteen and a half stone, but had the reputation of being very skilled at his craft. Though they never met it was speculated that Boganski's skill would be more than enough to counter the greater weight and strength of the seventeen stone Clark. Why the two were never signed up to meet is a mystery given that there were so few top draws at the time. Could be that the two men were with different promoters, neither wanting a showdown with the possible loss of their "Champion"?

Next in line for the title was Bert Assirati. His claim was ignored and reported in a contemporary sports magazine thus, "We can write nothing at present as we are not conversant with his plans". Maybe Assirati was abroad at the time so was not in a position to face Clark. Bert's sojourn in the USA gave enough of an indication of his ability to make him number one contender. In his 1932 trip he wrestled many of the wrestlers of legend and clocked up an amazing 63 wins and 2 draws out of a total of 65 bouts - this in a country that didn't delight in foreigners with the ability to win. I read recently of an American star of that era saying of Bert "Where's his record? He's wrestled no one of any ability"

Standing equal in third place were Steve Casey and George Clark. Casey, styling himself "Champion of All Ireland" made a great reputa-



**NORMAN MORRELL**

tion for himself soaring into the top rank. Various titles were bestowed upon him, including Crusher Casey or Flipper Casey, his first match in the States saw him beat Mike Mazurki an ex-college football player later to be a popular [or rather unpopular] "heavy" in Hollywood films.

This success was followed by a win over Gino Garibaldi - a darling of the Italian immigrant population. Casey, a 200lb. six-footer was, as an American critic said "hacked out of granite". Casey's experience in the New World would surely have stood him

in good stead had he contested in the British Isles but he was content to amass greenbacks Stateside.

Of George Clark, the number three contender, a whole book could be written. The hero of countless Highland Games and a great Scottish wrestler in the traditional mould, Clark, as Casey and Assirati had done, spent some time in the cauldron of US wrestling with massive success defeating Danno O'Mahoney, ex-World Champion, giving him his first taste of defeat since he had lost the title to Dick Shikat, "The German Oak".

This then was the calibre of the top British Heavyweights in 1937. Emerging from the machinations on the basis of skill and terrible power came the man who was to hold the throne until he was no longer offered opponents and had to go to the Orient to ply his trade. Bert Assirati.

Late in World War Two a group of promoters decided that with so many being cited as "Champions" damage was being done to the business and the problem should be dealt with. Enlisting a peer of the realm, Lord Mount-Evans of the Broke, together with other prominent people of the time, Commander Campbell of radio's "Brains Trust" and Maurice Webb MP. Joint Promotions, led by a highly skilled wrestler, five-times British Amateur Champion, Norman Morrell, set up a committee to formulate a set of rules for the 'Mount-Evans style of

wrestling' in the hope that they could clear up the title mess and give professional wrestling an aura of respectability. The Mount-Evans' choice of champions was displayed on the Joint Promotion's publicity posters nationwide. Their handbook "*Wrestling, The Admiral Lord Mount-Evans Style*" declared that 'the Admiral Lord Mount-Evans Rules have been adopted by the British Wrestling Promoters' Association for all Championship contests. This Association controls at least 95 per cent of all wrestling in Great Britain, and it is intended to establish national championships at all weights.' Still a number of independent promoters stood fast and declared their own "Champions" of all-in or Catch wrestling.

The coming of TV wrestling killed off that inclination. The commentators told the nation who the "Champions" were and the nation believed them.

*Oakley, Sir Atholl., [1971].  
Blue Blood on the Mat  
London; Stanley Paul*

*"Sporting Arena"  
magazines  
1934, 1935, 1936*

*Wrestling  
The Lord Mount-Evans Style  
[1945?]. Halifax, England;  
Wrestling News and Views Ltd*

## **WE DON'T KNOW WHAT CAUSES HEART DISEASE**

The medical [and social] consensus is that cardiovascular disease is caused by being overweight, by having a high-fat diet and by unhealthy activities such as smoking. While being morbidly obese, eating nothing but lard and smoking 60 a day will probably lead to an early grave, there is nevertheless a lot of confusion about the precise link between lifestyle and this, the biggest killer of all. Many people with high cholesterol levels in their blood do not get heart disease. Many people with very low levels do. The very low levels of heart disease recorded in some populations, notably the Japanese may have more to do with cultural variation and prejudice than with medical reality [in many societies, what are, in fact, heart attacks are often listed on death certificates as 'strokes']. Furthermore, some of the lowest levels of cholesterol and arterial sclerosis are to be found in populations such as the Inuit and Siberian hunter-gatherers, who live on a diet high in animal fats.

*Extracted from 'Global Warming And Other Bollocks', by Professors Vincent Marks and Stanley Feldman, published by Metro.*