When great fighters are discussed, invariably Charley Burley's name is thrown into the hopper. Yet few fans have ever seen him. I did.

It was only one fight, and it was on tape – somewhere’s between ‘44 and ‘46, at the tail end of his career, so I don't know if it's the best indicator of how good he was ... but it probably gives some sense of his style.

The fighter Burley fought was "Oakland" Billy Smith (later to become “Boardwalk” Billy Smith, when he courted Atlantic City fans) ... and I believe it was at light heavyweight. (Burley fought Smith twice, and won two decisions.)

The tape was in black-&-white – no sound, just titles to indicate the round numbers. But, for something dubbed many times, it was pretty clear … It didn't have that quick-stutter look that old-time footage has shot at silent-camera speed.

First off, Burley didn't look more than a blown-up welter – not a very physically imposing guy; and certainly in comparison to Smith, who had Hagler muscles – was much taller, with a much longer reach, Burley looked overmatched.

Burley was clearly from an earlier era. His hair was slicked down and parted in the middle, like all the pictures of Greb and Mickey Walker. His stance could have come right off the cover of the Police Gazette. The palms of his fists faced him, not sideways, as we're used to seeing now. It had that John L. Sullivan look.

The only thing he was missing to complete the picture were those skin-tight, knee-length trunks with the tied silk sash hanging down. Burley was almost an anachronism, because Smith looked no different than a modern fighter.

Burley moved well and circled in the pocket, but his stance almost resembled exactly Max Schmeling's against Joe Louis, with his head appearing to be forward but all of his weight and body back on his right foot. He would sucker Smith into believing he was within range, to draw a right hand, then counter over the top.

Burley was a precision puncher but threw few of them; every one counted. In ten rounds, he *never*
threw a combination – only one punch at a time... never fought inside or against the ropes. He darted in, punched and quickly held and smothered Smith.

Burley bided his time till he could fire that sniper-of-a-right, and rarely followed it with a left. His right was straight-as-a-level – seemed to have some pop ... and *never* missed.

But, what was apparent after a few rounds – and this was against a fighter that looked like he

had pretty good skills – Burley was un-hittable. He didn't even make elusive moves … he was just not touched by *anything*.

The only other fighter I've ever seen who had that same radar was Marcel Cerdan. When Pep and Whitaker did it, you wanted to applaud their skill. With Burley, he just *wasn't* being hit ... and he didn't avoid the punches. (It was the damnedest thing.)

He did everything he wanted to, and either had lost his zest for battle or was such a consummate pro; he did what he had to do to win and not much more.

Off this fight, I could see how Burley had the tools to win most all of his fights, but he'd certainly not be a crowd-pleaser. He was strictly a tactician, and no fighter or manager would want any part of him.

It would be impossible to look good against Burley ... even if you won; and Burley's style wouldn't bring fans out. So I can understand why it was tough for him to get fights. Promoters wouldn't book him.

After viewing this fight, I think it wasn't so much Burley's color that held him back, but his lack of it in the ring.

Though I'm sure both Robinson and his people were leery of facing Burley, even in the twilight of his career, if I had to hazard a guess as to who would’ve prevailed in their primes, I'd say Robinson, two out of three. In a single fight, it's dicey. Burley was very cagey and might have been a tough nut for Robinson to crack … *the first time*.

But Robinson was far more diversified offensively; his combinations were very flashy and explosive, and would not only catch the eyes of the judges but excite the fans and affect the scoring.

Burley was sweet but "Sugar" was sweeter.