



boxing

by don cogswell



**This** year's trip to Canastota, my third, for the Hall of Fame inductions weekend, continued to add texture and depth in experiencing one of boxing's principal convergences. The dazzle of being immersed in so many of boxing's notables does fade but the rewards of repeated visits with friends and associates deepen to center stage. Doing a little business also helps.

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The Random House Dictionary, unabridged, second edition, defines appetizer as "any small portion that stimulates a desire for more or that indicates more is to follow." An opportunity to meet fifties contender **Rocky Jones**, courtesy of former Chester heavyweight **Jack Mercadante** and Philly historian **Chuck Hasson**, was up to scratch in meeting that definition. (I had flown into Philadelphia from the West Coast, planning on driving north with these two notables, to Canastota.)

Rocky lives in a primarily African American neighborhood that was once predominately Italian American. The house Jack Mercadante grew up in is a stone's throw from Rocky's. Throughout our hour visit on his stoop, passerby's continuously asked Rocky if everything was all right. I felt privileged with his repeated mantra that everything was just fine. (Jones lives a short drive from Leiperville, where we passed, in homage, the site of **Baron Dougherty's** Colonial Hotel.)

Among the many comments of Rock's experiences, both in the ring and the gyms, the two bouts with **Roland LaStarza** loomed large. Rocky, essentially a lighthheavy, fought heavyweights throughout his career. LaStarza was in line for a title shot, and a big favorite when he fought Jones, but was upset over 10. A rematch was arranged and Rocky was told, "tonight ain't your night". (L10)

Rocky also featured **Billy Fox's** punching power in his recollections who, despite his tainted win over **LaMotta**, could legitimately bang. Rocky said he held his own in the gym wars with Billy.

Jack and Chuck Hasson, in Rock's words "God willing", hope to bring him up to the Hall in 2003. Rocky Jones is, in addition to being a gracious host, sharp, solid and 81.



The main course followed our road trip north. An induction weekend at the Hall is, by its very nature, episodic, with events flowing right along with the libations. So is the following.

**Mickey Ward** made the festivities and you couldn't find a more accommodating boxing figure.



His fans seemed to appreciate he was giving as much out of the ring as in. I wished him the easiest fight for the most dough, his conundrum being, barring his debilitating left hook to the body, Mickey doesn't possess knockout power and easy victories are seldom assured. He's positioned for at least one major payday and here's hoping the price isn't too steep.

Peripatetic **Earnie Shavers** was autographing copies of his just released Welcome to the Big Time. After reading it on the flight in I was struck at his ease of movement to where ever life's opportunities presented themselves. One of boxing's post-career success stories, Shavers currently lives in Moreton, on the Wirral, in England.

Top fifties/sixties welter **Gasper Ortega** again made the trip. He's spending two hours a day with super middleweight prospect **Chad Dawson**, New Haven, CT. (7-0 with 5KO) Tall for his division, I asked Gasper how he taught an outside fighter to go inside with a minimum of risk. He preferred a bending down in the knees approach to the problem, in contradistinction to a Hearn's-like bending over from side to side. As instructive as his demonstration was, it unfortunately caught the imagination of a tall-for-her-division blonde, who's over-the-top pestering of Gasper demonstrated his aplomb every bit the equal of Ward's.

**Gerry Cooney's** Fighter's Initiative for Support and Training (FIST) was manning a booth at the annual card and memorabilia show. I spoke to a gentleman by the name of Norman Weiss who told me he was co-founder of the organization. I asked his opinion on the mental well being a fighter's record, remaining accessible and intact, might have on an individual retired from the ring. I added my wife works for the San Francisco VA in veteran's rehab and when a veteran's service jacket is found to contain frequent omissions of that veteran's service time, a sense of abuse bordering on betrayal is not unusual. I pointed out the capability of retaining every fighters record is now a possibility.

Mr. Weiss responded that there was no need or desire to keep the records of obscure fighters, in his opinion no one would have any use what-so-ever for these archives. At first I had trouble grasping the position he was putting forward, in the context of his position as co-founder of FIST, whose mission statement includes helping ex-prizefighters to "become healthy, well-adjusted productive members of society" but with Mr. Weiss' emphatic re-statement on this issue, I got his message.

I hope this ill-fitting piece of the FIST mosaic is a misfit and not indicative of any underlying agenda detrimental to boxing's backbone, it's rank-and-file journeyman. An organization with the stated goals of FIST addresses one of boxing's most pressing needs and hardly needs to be undercut with the position expressed by Mr. Weiss.

Boxing's historians' IBRO, the International Boxing Research Organization, had perhaps its strongest showing ever at Canastota. In attendance were Hall of Fame member **Ralph Citro**; fight impresario **Johnny Bos**; IBRO director **Dan Cuoco**; Cyber Boxing Zone editor **Mike DeLisa**; Philadelphia's Chuck Hasson; boxing godfather **Hank Kaplan**; Toronto's all-time heavyweight ratings mad scientist, **Mike Paul**; documentarian **Mike Silver**; Black fighter maven **Kevin Smith**; **Joe Lannan**, whose g-g-grandfather fought bare knuckles; putting the sweet science on another canvas, artist **Bob Carson**; promoter/matchmaker **Don Majeski**; veteran boxing author, reporter, and record keeper **Herb Goldman** and yours truly.



Half a dozen IBROs. Silver, Cuoco, Carson, Cogswell, Hasson, Smith

Maybe next year we'll get around to a meeting.

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