

Boxing Hall of Fame is not for Pretty Good Boxers

Written by George Kimball
Friday, 05 November 2004 18:00

The eminent American philosopher Julius Henry Marx once said that he wouldn't wish to belong to any club that would have him as a member. It occurred to us as we opened our ballot for the Class of 2005 that Groucho might well have been describing the International Boxing Hall of Fame at Canastota.

The upstate New York institution has succeeded where several predecessors (and at least one contemporary competitor) have failed, and has successfully established itself as the guardian of the sport's legacy. Past inductees, many of them the great champions of yesteryear, along with thousands of boxing fans flock to the annual induction ceremonies each June. The Canastota venue has become to boxing what Cooperstown is to baseball and Canton is to the National Football League.

Executive Director Ed Brophy has done a marvelous job in transforming the H of F from a far-fetched concept to a veritable institution in just 15 years, but if the Hall of Fame is to maintain that lofty standard, the time has come to alter the election procedure before the membership becomes hopelessly diluted.

Here's the problem: This year's electors were sent a ballot comprised of 45 names and instructed to vote for ten of them. The top four vote-getters from the following list of nominees will be elected.

- Horacio Accavallo
- Joey Archer
- Jose Becerra
- Johnny Bratton
- Jimmy Carruthers
- Bobby Chacon
- Jung-Koo Chang
- Donald Curry
- Hiroyuki Ebihara
- Tommy Farr
- Tiger Jack Fox
- Ceferino Garcia
- Betulio Gonzalez
- Yoko Gushiken
- Carlos Hernandez
- Rafael Herrera
- Al Hostak
- Harry Jeffra
- Peter Kane
- Cocoa Kid

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- Pone Kingpetch
- Tippy Larkin
- Jose Legra
- Duilio Loi
- Barry McGuigan
- Ernesto Marcel
- Lloyd Marshall
- Freddie Mills
- Brian Mitchell
- Rinty Monaghan
- Terry Norris
- Masao Ohba
- Eddie Perkins
- Gustave Roth
- Lou Salica
- Dave Sands
- Petey Scalzo
- Samuel Serrano
- Yoshio Shirai
- Kid Tunero
- Holman Williams
- Myung-Woo Yuh
- Hilario Zapata

We defy anyone to find four *bona fide* Hall of Famers on that list, let alone ten.

The rules, of course, don't *require* electors to vote for ten candidates. (Over the years, we've never used all ten votes, but then we've never used all ten for the Baseball Hall of Fame, either.) They *do*, however, require that four candidates be elected, and any way you slice it, putting in four boxers from this list is destined to water down the product.

We understand why the guidelines were originally established. Boxing had, as an organized sport, been in existence for over a century when the Hall of Fame put its roots down in 1989, and there was lots of catching up to do in those early years. But the time has now arrived to be more circumspect about future elections. If there are four deserving candidates in a year, sure, put them all in. But this is supposed to be a shrine for the sport's immortals, not just those who had decent careers.

Some will argue that this year's list of nominees includes fighters more deserving than some who are already IN the Hall of Fame. This merely proves our point: The saturation point has already been reached. The Hall of Fame enshrines already include, for instance, Ken Norton, who was quite literally the only heavyweight "champion" in boxing history to lose all three title fights in which he participated.

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One could make a legitimate argument that McGuigan, for instance, deserves inclusion for essentially the same reasons that Marcel Cerdan was posthumously elected to the Hall of Fame. Although Barry's time atop the world stage was brief, but for geographic and political reasons he achieved a position that transcended the sport. He was not only the most revered sporting figure in two countries (Ireland and Great Britain), but was in the mid-1980s the world's best featherweight, and beat another great champion in Eusebio Pedroza to get there.

A case could be made as well for Mitchell. It's hard to ignore a 45-1-3 career record, even if it did take him 33 fights before he won one outside South Africa.

Apart from those two borderline cases, most of the names on the ballot don't hold up well to scrutiny. A random sampling:

Pone Kingpetch won (and lost) the flyweight title three times, but he lost one-fifth of his career bouts (28-7), and was 3-3 in fights outside his native Thailand.

Archer (46-4) was a very decent middleweight of the 1960s who beat Dick Tiger, Hurricane Carter, and a 44 year-old Sugar Ray Robinson, but he fought for the title twice and lost both times to Emile Griffith.

Tommy Farr? He lost 30 fights – including five in a row when he was in his absolute prime.

Horacio Accavallo won the WBA flyweight title and had a record of 75-2-6, but consider this: 38 of his wins (37 in his native Argentina and one in Paraguay) came against opponents who'd never won a single fight!

Harry Jeffra (93-20-7) was a top-level club fighter who briefly held the bantamweight title, but he was knocked down three times by Sixto Escobar in their rematch and lost his only other title bid against Joey Archibald.

Ceferino Garcia was 100-26 and lost the three biggest fights of his career – to Barney Ross, Henry Armstrong, and Ken Overlin.

Donald Curry? 34-6, including losses to Terry Norris, Lloyd Honeyghan, Mike McCallum, and Michael Nunn.

Norris was 47-9, and while two of the losses came in his bizarre trilogy with Luis Santana, he was knocked out by both Julian Jackson and Simon Brown. Norris did win some big fights – his classic KO of John (The Beast) Mugabi and his humiliation of an aging Ray Leonard – but his was finished as a useful fighter by the age of 30, and closed out with losses to Keith Mullings, Dana Rosenblatt, and Laurent Boudouani.

If Norris gets elected in 2005 (which he may well be), should we put those three on next year's ballot?

Here's our suggestion: Since the membership has by now swelled to an acceptable number,

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there's no longer any need to play catch-up by insisting on four new inductees each year. Baseball doesn't do that, and the Hall of Fame is the better for it.

If the rules were amended to require that any nominee receive the vote of at least 75% of the electors, his selection would be more meaningful. If four guys get three-quarters of the vote, fine, induct all four of them. (If nobody gets 75%, put the top vote-getter in, if only to ensure that there will *be* an induction ceremony in June.)

This is, after all, supposed to be a Boxing Hall of Fame, not the Hall of Pretty Good Boxers.