"C'mon, wake up!" said Bob Jackson. "We've got work to do!"

Jackson said those words to his longtime best friend and partner, Al Gavin. However, Jackson said those words with a heavy heart and a quivering voice. He knew Al wasn't getting up. Gavin, 69, lay in a coma, put that way by a stroke deep in his brain a little over a week earlier. Together, as two of the most lovable and respected trainers in boxing, they had seen so many fighters launch incredible comebacks, defying the overwhelming odds against them. But, Jackson knew this was not going to be one of those incredible comebacks. On Thursday, July 8, 2004, at a few minutes past 4:00 p.m., Al Gavin died peacefully at Winthrop Hospital in Mineola, New York.

I had paid a visit to Al less than three hours earlier. His wife, Joyce, his mother, Barbara, and his son, Tony, were also there.

As Joyce held his left hand, Barbara told me, "We're taking dad off life support. Tests have shown no brain activity. This is the way he would want it."

I took Al's lifeless right hand--a hand that once held an ice pack on a mouse under my left eye--and kissed it. Barbara told me the family would keep me posted. About three hours later, Barbara's husband, boxing judge Bob Gilson, called with the bad news.

The reaction around the boxing world is no surprise.

"Al was simply the best," said Ron Scott Stevens, Chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission.

"Al was a total professional," said Marc Ratner, Executive Director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission.

Top boxing broadcaster and manager, Arnie "Tokyo" Rosenthal, was shocked when he heard the news of Gavin's death.

"I was just at a show with Al down in Bermuda," said Rosenthal. "I can't believe it!" Then, he took a deep breath and continued.

"Al was more than the best cutman. He was a scribe, a sage. He spanned generations in the business, from the golden days right up until today. I was fortunate to have been able to spend a lot of time with him. I used to love to sit around and listen to him tell stories. He was such a great teacher, a fantastic storyteller and a great friend."

Perhaps the last athlete Gavin trained was Ryan Kelly, a college-bound Long Islander. Kelly, 18, is the son of top New York referee Wayne Kelly. Last week, Gavin had put Ryan through a

rigorous training session. The following morning, upon hearing the news that Gavin had suffered a massive stroke, young Kelly wept openly and unashamedly. That's the impact Gavin had on people's lives. That's how much he was loved.

"There was nobody like him," said Bob Duffy, the former Chief Inspector and later Director of Boxing Operations of the New York State Athletic Commission. "He always had a kind word to say about everybody. He was always ready to lend a helping hand to anybody who needed it."

The accolades are endless. From the college-bound to the title-bound, everybody loved Al Gavin.

I'm sure former heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis, for whom Gavin served for years as a cutman, was hit harder by the news of Gavin's death than any punch he ever took in the ring. The same goes for Vitali Klitschko, Micky Ward, Brian Adams, Junior Jones, Tony Danza, and every man or woman who ever laced on gloves and had the great fortune to be taught by Gavin. To all of us, his death is a cruel, hard blow.

When I met Gavin, I was a 25-year-old reporter for World Boxing Magazine. Gavin, who was 39 at the time, treated me as if I was a nationally-syndicated superstar columnist. He dished out respect in huge amounts.

He worked with the best (Lennox Lewis), the gutsiest (Micky Ward) and the worst (yours truly, in 1976). To him, we were all the same.

When I became Editor-in-Chief of The Ring, that respect never changed. Nor did it change when I became an announcer for ESPN, the USA Network and the MSG Network. I got nothing but respect from the man.

That all changed the day I become head of the New York State Athletic Commission in 1988. On that first day up at 270 Broadway in New York City, I received a call from Al.

"Congratulations on your appointment and first day on the job, Commissioner," he said. "I look forward to being a licensee under you, Commissioner."

I thanked him for his kind words, then reminded him I had known him 14 years, that he was my friend and that my name is "Randy," not "Commissioner."

"You're the Commissioner now, and that's how I address men with titles," he told me. That meant a lot to me. After I left the commission, many fair-weather friends jumped ship. I had expected that to happen. People love you when you're on top and forget you when you're not. There were even a few surprise "ship-jumpers" upon my departure. Al Gavin was not one of them.

Not a day went by when he failed to call me "Commissioner" or "Mr. Commissioner" or "Commissioner Gordon."

"You earned the title, now keep it," he always said. "Once a champ, always a champ. Once a commissioner, always a commissioner."

Yet, it wasn't how well he treated me that I was always impressed with. It was how well he treated others. He treated champions the way champions like to be treated, and he treated the biggest losers in the gym like champions.

Al Gavin loved the sport of boxing and he loved everybody in it. That's why, in return, everybody loved him.

Along with Joyce, his wife of 51 years, and daughter Barbara, Al is survived by another daughter, Maureen, and a son, Alan, along with son-in-law Bob Gilson.

In losing Al Gavin, boxing lost one of its truly great champions.

He hasn't yet been admitted to Boxing's Hall of Fame. Let's clear an area. The Hall awaits him.