

Angelo Dundee Talks Heavyweights

Written by Luca De Franco

Wednesday, 21 December 2005 19:00

During his 60+ years in the fight game, legendary trainer Angelo Dundee has been involved with five heavyweight champions: Muhammad Ali, Jimmy Ellis, Pinklon Thomas, George Foreman and Adilson Rodrigues. It could be more correct to say four champions, because Rodrigues won the not so prestigious WBF title, but in the eyes of Angelo all titles are the same if they are recognized and the purse is right.

You can be sure that the money was good; otherwise Angelo would have advised his kid (he refers to them all that way, including Muhammad Ali) to take another option. As for the WBF being recognized, it is true that most people don't even know its real name: World Boxing Foundation. Even some top guys, call it World Boxing Federation. Anyway, I discovered that in Brazil everybody recognizes the WBF and therefore considers Rodrigues a legitimate world champion.

That's what another trainer told me. His name was Sidney Gomes and I met him in Jersey City on October 2004. Gomes told me that Rodrigues was one of his amateurs, they became close friends, and Adilson wanted him in his corner after splitting with Angelo. Of course, Gomes (who also coached the Brazilian national team for five years) knew Angelo Dundee and told me good things about him. Like everybody else I met in the boxing business, in Italy and the United States.

And like many people in the movie business, too, the most famous of them being Russell Crowe. I tried to get an interview with him many times, but never could. So I called Angelo and he said: *You are gonna get the interview.* About a week later, I received a call from Russell Crowe's assistant saying that the actor would call me the next day. He did. The Oscar-winning star talked to me for about 45 minutes, from Australia, and turned out to be a very nice guy. At the end of the conversation, he said: *Angelo asked me to do it and I did it. Don't you consider a privilege being a friend of Angelo Dundee?*

My answer was:

Absolutely!

I never met anybody like him in Milan. Angelo's experience makes him one of the most knowledgeable persons around, a man whose opinion counts. That's why I asked him about the current status of the heavyweight division.

If you were active today, who would you manage?

Samuel Peter. He is a talented kid and has the most important quality for an heavyweight: sheer power. I saw him fighting many times and I'm convinced he still has a lot to learn. He must also improve his strategy, but he can make it big. Samuel can definitely become heavyweight champion.

Do you think he can rule the division, like Mike Tyson did?

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I don't think so. If you look at the history of the division, you notice that only a few fighters dominated their era: Joe Louis (1937-1942 and 1946-1948), Rocky Marciano (1952-1955), Muhammad Ali (1964-1967 and 1974-1978), Larry Holmes (1978-1985), Mike Tyson (1986-1990 and 1996-1997). Outstanding talents like them are rare. That's true for the other divisions as well.

In the other divisions, what fighters do you like?

Erik Morales and Marco Antonio Barrera. Their battles remind me of the great fights of the past, like Ray Robinson vs. Jake LaMotta. Guys who give it all every time they step into the ring, who land hundreds of punches and do not surrender when they get hit. These are the real champions. Barrera and Morales remind me of Carlos Zarate, Salvador Sanchez and many other legends.

Going back to the heavyweight division, do you think it is in bad shape, now?

I don't think so. There are a lot of good fighters. Of course, you cannot compare them to the all-time greats. As I said before, the situation we are in now is the norm. One fighter dominating for many years knocking out everybody else, is the exception.

About one year ago, George Foreman said he wanted to get back in the ring against younger fellows. Many people considered it the final proof of the lack of talent in the heavyweight division.

Not me. If anybody could come back and be successful, that would be George Foreman. He has always been talented, he has a great working attitude and can knock everybody out with a single punch, even today at 56 years old. Remember that a boxer can lose his speed, reflexes, coordination, but not his power. George Foreman is *nu bravu guagliunu* (a good guy, in Southern Italian slang). Besides, who can be sure to defeat him?

You said that George Foreman is *nu bravu guagliunu*. Do you still remember the Calabrese dialect

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Of course, I do. The Calabrese dialect is my first language. My parents were from Roggiano Gravina, a small village close to the city of Cosenza (in the Calabria region). To make the readers of *The Sweet Science* understand where Calabria is: Italy has the form of a boot, Calabria is the final part of that boot. Anyway, my parents spoke only the dialect in the house. That's why for the first six years of my life, I spoke only Calabrese. I learned English when they sent me to elementary school. You could say that I'm the original greaseball. In school, everybody told me I spoke English with an Italian accent. In Italy, they tell me I speak Italian with a Calabrese accent. Who cares? I'm happy to know many languages. I also speak Spanish.

Are you planning to return to managing fighters?

No way. I'm happy to live in Florida and to travel across the United States when they invite me

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as a special guest to boxing cards and events. Last June, I was at the International Boxing Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Canastota. Among others, I met Nino Benvenuti, Emile Griffith and Gil Clancy. Last October 26, I went to the Black Tie Boxing card promoted by Gerry Cooney and Joe DeGuardia (I've been a friend of his father for 50 years) at the prestigious Hilton Hotel in midtown Manhattan. Right now, I'm in Tampa living in my son's house and taking care of my grandchildren. Next year, I would love attend a major boxing show in Italy. If somebody invites me, I will be happy to come.

Angelo Dundee's world heavyweight champions:

Muhammad Ali

1st Title Reign: Undisputed Champion from February 25, 1964 to March 22, 1967 (last defense against Zora Folley).

2nd Title Reign: WBA/WBC Champion from October 30, 1974 to February 15, 1978

3rd Title Reign: WBA Champion on September 15, 1978. Ali never defended the title and announced his retirement on September 6, 1979

Jimmy Ellis – WBA Champion from April 27, 1968 to February 16, 1970

Pinklon Thomas – WBC Champion from August 31, 1984 to March 22, 1986

George Foreman – WBA Champion on November 5, 1994. IBF Champion from November 5, 1994 to April 22, 1995

Adilson Rodrigues – WBF Champion from March 12, 1995 to May 18, 1996.