

## Already missing Andy Suarez

Written by David A. Avila  
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The loss of Riverside, California's boxing trainer Andy Suarez hit like a hailstorm in the entire Inland Empire.

Suarez, 59, died last week from undetermined causes.

During the last 20 years the sport of boxing has exploded along with the population boom in the region that spans from Pomona to Blythe with the help of trainers like Suarez who developed amateurs and professionals at the tiny Lincoln Boxing Club gym.

On a daily basis children and adults can be seen entering the corner boxing gym located on 14th and Victoria Avenue. Both men and women enter the gym that houses one single boxing ring and has a wall that opens up to allow circulation.

Suarez was a fixture at the gym.

"He helped me when I first started," said Henry Ramirez, who now helps train upcoming boxing aspirants himself. "I learned a lot from him."

Suarez and many other Inland area trainers cut a path into the world of boxing with the help of various Indian casinos that followed the lead of Las Vegas using pro boxing as a lure to its gaming tables and slots. On a regular basis Inland area fighters are included on boxing cards at Indian casinos in Temecula, Indio, Palm Springs, Cabazon and San Bernardino.

"Guys like Andy Suarez were the first to train fighters in the area," said Larry Ramirez (no relation to Henry), who runs the Fontana Boxing Club.

About 30 boxing gyms now exist in the Inland area, a number rivaling those in the Los Angeles County area that is considered an international hotbed for boxing.

Though dozens of pro and amateur boxers have emerged from the Inland area, recognition has been scant.

Since the 1990s fighters like Coachella's Diaz brothers Julio, Antonio and Joel, Pomona's Shane Mosley, Mira Loma's Carlos Bojorquez, San Bernardino's Velardez brothers Bobby Boy, Armando Jr., John John and Chris, and Colton's Freddie Barrera and Dominic Salcido have emerged on the boxing scene to name a few.

Trainers like Suarez prepared many of these aforementioned fighters with little fanfare.

This year his son Mark Suarez has become as one of the top welterweights in the nation and

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currently ranks number four in the WBO, number six in the WBA, number nine in the WBC and number one according to the IBF.

“Andy Suarez was a very good trainer. He just didn’t get the recognition he deserved,” said Cameron Dunkin, who manages Mark Suarez and several dozen other talented boxers.

Mark Suarez, who has knocked out his last seven opponents, is tabbed to be the next welterweight champion with his fast hands and long reach.

“Mark has become a deadly fighter,” said Henry Ramirez, who assisted Andy for six years. “I don’t know where he got that punch but he’s knocking them out in the welterweight division.”

With Mark Suarez on the verge of winning a world title, it’s bittersweet with the passing of his father, who intensely believed in his son’s potential.

“He always said Mark was going to be a world champion,” Ramirez said, adding that he also believed in the talent of junior lightweight Josesito Lopez who trained since the age of nine when he first entered the boxing gym.

Unlike other parts of the country, the Inland area, including Riverside, does not have a long tradition of world-class boxing. Therefore recognition of its many trainers and teachers does not exist to rival those in other parts of the country.

Suarez was one of the first.

“I met Andy around the 1970s and he was training fighters back then,” said Fontana’s Ramirez who was a U.S. boxing coach on the 1988 Olympic team. “We’ve lost a lot of knowledge when we lost Andy.”

Willy Silva, who runs the Mira Loma Boxing Club and has trained Bojorquez and Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., often called Suarez to help his fighters.

“We met 10 years ago when Mark was in the Blue and Gold Tournament,” Silva said. “He was real strong about his convictions.”

Suarez believed in honesty and integrity and he was intensely loyal to friends.

About three years ago, a San Bernardino fighter named Bobby Boy Velardez was set to meet Mexico’s Erik “El Terrible” Morales in Las Vegas. During the weighing Morales could not meet the required weight. A crowd of supporters gathered around the great fighter and held a towel around him. Suarez walked behind the Morales crowd that tried to keep people away and muscled his way to see the results of the scale. He spotted one of the men holding Morales up with a finger from behind so that he could make the required weight limit. Suarez began shouting at the man to quit cheating. They tried to yell him down but he shouted louder. The man realized he was caught cold cheating and quickly backed away. Morales failed to make the required weight limit. Back he went to try and sweat off the extra pound.

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Velardez lost that night, but Suarez was content that it was done honestly.

“They tried to rob him,” he said that night.

In a way, the Inland area has been robbed of a humble person who gave 100 percent of his self to the youth of the area.

“It wasn’t about the money, it was a labor of love for Andy,” said Art Carrillo, a trainer out of the Lake Elsinore area who met Suarez in 1983.

Now he’s passed the torch to others.

### **Nobody Wins in Atlantic City**

James Toney and Hasim Rahman’s fight to a draw left both with their titles but left the heavyweight division without a herald. Though Toney keeps his IBA and Rahman the WBC belt, many in the boxing world hoped the fight would determine the leader of the professional boxing world.

“I thought I won the fight,” said Toney, who landed the crisper more defining punches, but not enough to offset Rahman’s many jabs that landed throughout the 12 round affair. It was a pitty-pat attack by the Baltimore boxer that kept him in the hunt and that’s all that Toney allowed him.

Had the Michigan native been able to sustain a full-out attack, it would have been a clear victory for Toney who lost the win in the very last round. One solid punch separated him from the win column and gaining the WBC title.

Rahman seemed pleased with his effort and should be. Had he not come in tiptop shape the Rock may have succumbed to some of those monster looping right hands midway through the fight. Toney lost steam and was unable to shift into another gear. The extra 15 pounds probably had a lot to do with it.

A championship fight is much like a marathon race. You can’t carry extra baggage in a 26-mile race or extra pounds in a 12 round battle against a man much larger and all muscle.

Toney bellowed to Top Rank’s Bob Arum to make a rematch, but the Las Vegas-based promoter has already signed his protégé to meet Oleg Maskaev in a rematch. It’s a fight few want to see. The memory of watching Maskaev blown out by Lance Whitaker back in 2000 is still fresh in many people’s mind.

A second match between Toney and Rahman seems like a natural fit.

### **Fights on television**

Fri. ESPN2, 6 p.m., Edison Miranda (25-0) vs. Howard Eastman (40-3).

Fri. Telefutura, 9 p.m., Manuel Miranda (65-14) vs. Javier Alvarez (33-4-1).

Fri. Telemundo, 11:30 p.m., Cosme Rivera (28-9-2) vs. Gilberto Reyes (18-2-1).