

The Danny Long and the short of it

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Early on in Irish mobster John “Red” Shea’s recently published memoir “Rat Bastards: The Life and Times of South Boston’s Most Honorable Irish Mobster,” the paroled associate of infamous crime kingpin Whitey Bulger talks about how much he admired a boyhood neighbor named Danny Long.

Long, who was seven years older than Shea, fought professionally from 1979-84. A onetime ESPN staple, the slick-boxing Long never embarrassed himself in compiling a 30-8 (14 KOs) against such championship caliber opponents and top contenders as Bobby Czyz, Doug DeWitt, Alex Ramos, Dave “Boy” Green, and Robbie Sims.

Shea, who won many titles as an amateur, had one pro bout. Fighting as a junior lightweight, he stopped Jose Ortiz in two rounds in Boston in March 1986.

From the way Long tells it, and the way South Boston, which is best known as Southie, has been chronicled in two other recent books, it might seem as if everyone from there became either a criminal or a cop.

A few weeks ago another recently paroled gangster named Kevin Weeks, who also had a rich amateur boxing history, appeared on the television show “60 Minutes” to tout his new book “Brutal: The Untold Story of My Life Inside Whitey Bulger’s Irish Mob.”

Yet another just published book called “The Brothers Bulger: How They Terrorized and Corrupted Boston for a Quarter Century” chronicles the lives of Whitey, who has been on the lam since 1995 and is right behind Osama bin Laden on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted List, and his brother William, the former president of the Massachusetts State Senate.

The 48-year-old Long, who has been a Boston police officer since 1989, says that, contrary to what those books might suggest, there are an abundance of solid citizens from Southie.

“A lot of guys I boxed with became wiseguys,” he said. “But a lot didn’t. That life never appealed to me. I never had any interest in it.”

Long remembers many of the fellows who would later become infamous around Boston—and beyond—from the gym, but says that his relationship with them never went beyond their shared passion for boxing.

“I was in the gym every day,” said Long. “Boxing was my life. A lot of guys came and went, but I was always there.”

Early in his pro career, Long remembers sparring with a fellow who was a known leg breaker for the mob. The next day he ran into the guy on the street. “Hey, Long,” the guy said. “Look what you did to my arm.”

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He then showed Long all of the black and blues he had accumulated grappling with the always savvy Long on the inside.

“I’d go to the gym, put on my equipment and spar with anyone and adjust accordingly,” said Long. “That guy didn’t have a lot of experience, so I grappled with him rather than punched with him.”

Like most South Boston boxers, Long began his career at McDonough’s Gym before “graduating” to Connolly’s Gym, where most of the local pros trained.

Among the fighters he trained alongside were Sean Mannion, who in 1984 challenged Mike McCallum for the vacant WBA junior middleweight title at Madison Square Garden, and with whom Long says he sparred hundreds of rounds, junior welterweight Kevin Dorian, super featherweight Tommy Connors, who in October 1970 scored a 13-second knockout over Lloyd Wilson at the Boston Garden, current Los Angeles trainer extraordinaire Macka Foley, and middleweight Joe DeNucci, who is now the Auditor for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Long originally started boxing in the Baby Golden Gloves, but didn’t take the sport seriously until he was in high school. Once he got that second wind, boxing became his life.

His professional career took him all over the world and he remembers each and every fight with vivid detail.

Regarding his fifth round TKO loss to Czyz, which took place at the Playboy Club in McAfee, New Jersey, in February 1981, he said, “That was a tough fight. Bobby could punch and you really felt his power. He hit me with a left hook to the body. I got up and tried to catch my breath, but he swarmed me with punches and [referee] Larry Hazzard stopped the fight.”

He also lost an eight-round decision to Alex Ramos, who was then 8-0, on ABC’s Wide World of Sports in May 1981. The fight took place in San Remo, Italy. “He was sharpshooting me at the end and won a decision,” said Long.

What was probably the highlight of his pro career was also a fight that he lost, a 12-round decision to Robbie Sims, the half-brother of Marvin Hagler in Sims’ hometown of Brockton, Massachusetts, in May 1984. It was Long’s last fight.

“A couple of busloads of fans came from Southie,” said Long. “I probably had more fans there than Robbie did, and it was his hometown. Marvin Hagler and Donald Curry were doing the announcing.

“I thought I should have gotten that decision. I really wanted a rematch but it never came to be.”

At the age of 26 Long packed it in, a decision that he has never regretted. “I look back fondly at my career,” he said. “I traveled all over the United States and to countries like England, France, and Canada. I didn’t have the biggest punch but I was evasive and able to frustrate opponents by hitting them and not getting hit in return.”

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While boxing, and even after his career was over, Long held a variety of jobs. He was a correctional officer at Walpole State Prison, as well as a truck driver, banquet waiter, airplane loader, and construction worker.

Joining the police department has proven to be one of the best decisions of his life. For his entire career, he has worked in East Boston. Known to locals as Eastie, it was once as Italian as Southie is Irish, but is now heavily populated by first generation immigrants from South America.

“At one time it was like an Italian mirror image of Southie,” said Long. “Not anymore.”

He started his police career as a patrol officer, but is now a full time youth services officer. Long spends his days visiting schools and teaching youngsters lessons on gang resistance.

“They are well-rounded lessons on how society works,” said Long, who when explaining the curriculum sounds more like an enthusiastic academic than an ex-pug who happens to be a cop.

“Among the things I teach them is how to set goals and achieve them, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, rules and laws, and all about crime victims and their rights as citizens. I get to talk in 45 minute increments. I hope that I reach them.”

Long said that even the best parents have trouble holding their kids’ attention for three minutes, much less 45. Because he loves children so much, and believes so strongly in helping them build a solid foundation for themselves, he considers it a privilege to be doing what he does for a living.

“My own kids, if I spoke for three minutes they’d be rolling their eyes,” he joked.

In addition to the classroom training, Long has been able to teach some kids the rudiments of boxing, and has also taken many on skiing and whitewater rafting trips to show them that there is life beyond the inner city that they call home.

“That’s what they remember the most,” he says. “I might be working on a detail and a car will stop and a passenger will say, ‘Hey, Officer Dan.’ Most likely, what they remember is the rafting trip or the ski trip.”

Long is still somewhat involved in boxing through his youngest son, 17-year-old Ryan, a Boston College High School student who just competed in the National Junior Olympics in Brownsville, Texas.

Ryan will also lace them up in a fundraiser hosted by Micky Ward and Arturo Gatti that is scheduled for March 24 in Boston.

“He boxes well and he takes it seriously, so I don’t worry about him,” said Long. “My other son also boxed, but gave it up after joining the [Boston] Fire Department.”

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In addition to Patrick, his firefighter son, Long and his wife Mary, to whom he has been married for 25 years, have two daughters. Jane, 25, is a schoolteacher, and 19-year-old Kaitlyn is a college student.

On March 17, Long was working uniformed security for a show at the Roxy, a fabled East Boston venue where local hero Micky Ward unsuccessfully challenged Vince Phillips for the IBF junior welterweight title in August 1997.

Ironically, Phillips was also headlining this ESPN2 show against Jose Feliciano.

Because Long is on the board of directors of Ring Four of the Veteran Boxers Association, he is still recognized by everyone in the fight fraternity.

While he was just another cop in uniform to the casual fans, he couldn't help but think back to his younger days when the Roxy was still known as the Bradford Hotel Ballroom.

It was the site of one his two 1983 fights against East Boston rival Mark Mainero.

Because that bout was on the same weekend as an annual Eastie vs. Southie football game, there was a lot more than usual on the line. Not only did Long win a decision, he also garnered a lifetime of happy memories.

"There was a lot more pressure on me than usual," he said nostalgically. "To be back there, almost 25 years later, my mind couldn't help but wander. It's such a long time, but the time went so quick.

"The Roxy has always been such a great venue," he added. "It's a small and confined area with a balcony. There's not a bad seat in the house and the fights are always good. That's one thing that hasn't changed. Who knows, someday my son might fighter there. Wouldn't that be something?"