

In Boxing News: Fifty years since Rocky Marciano retired

It's been fifty years since the great Hall of Fame heavyweight who fought out of Brockton, Massachusetts, retired on April 27, 1956, with his undefeated record (49-0, 43 KOs) intact.

We're talking, of course, about **Rocky Marciano**, aka the Brockton Blockbuster, aka The Rock. There are a couple of well deserved tributes to Rocky in the press today, and the meatier of the two, in the *Orlando Sentinel*, opens with a quote from award winning novelist and boxing maven

Norman Mailer

: "The heavyweight champion of the world is either the toughest man in the world, or he is not, but there is a real possibility he is. It is like being the big toe of God." Rocky Marciano, nee Rocco Francis Marchegiano, was, as the name suggests, the son of Italian immigrants. His father worked in a shoe factory during the Great Depression, and his son was "determined to find a better way of life." Marciano tried baseball and made it all the way to the minors as a catcher, before his quit catching for our "great secular nationalistic church," in the words of

Philip Roth

, to begin throwing punches for the world at large. "It (Rocky's undefeated record) stands on its own as the second most important statistical monument in sports after '56," boxing historian

Bert Sugar

said, paying homage to

Joe DiMaggio

's 56-game hitting streak. Marciano was definitely something else. "His right fist had a name "Suzie Q" and a nasty disposition. Suzie Q took a wallop at Jersey

Joe Walcott

and etched his profile for eternity with a 13th-round shot to the head. "No question," added Sugar, "he was the hardest puncher in the history of the sport," despite the fact that he was only 5-10¼ and 184 pounds, despite the fact that he had two left feet.

["I knew the Rock when he first came to New York," said longtime trainer Angelo Dundee.](#)

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Charley Goldman

(Marciano's trainer) called me and said, 'Ang, I want you to come with me today to the CYO. I'm training this kid from Massachusetts, and I want you to see him because he's short, stocky and bald-headed with sweeping shoulders but, boy, can he punch.' Everything Charlie told me about him was true." Rocky turned pro in 1947 and five years later he KO'd Jersey Joe Walcott in the 13th round to win the heavyweight title. He defended the crown six times before retiring in September 1955. On the day he retired Rocky said, "I'm getting out while I can. I'm dumping this guy (a not-so-veiled reference to his despised manager

Al Weil

) before he dumps me" | Few of us pay much attention to the third man in the ring, which is as it should be, because the best refs are unobtrusive, blending invisibly into the action. Canadian

Written by Robert Ecksel
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referee

Hubert Earle

has worked dozens of world title fights, but thereâ€™s a card Saturday night in Halifax which has the longtime official hitting the books. "This is the first [Extreme Cage Combat] card and the worst part [is that] everyone is looking," said Earle, referee-in-chief for both Boxing Nova Scotia and Boxing Canada. "One thing goes wrong and it could ruin the whole thing.

[Thereâ€™s a lot of pressure to make it go right.](#)

Thatâ€™s the challenge, to stay out of trouble. But staying out of trouble and doing something for these guys, that just makes my day." It sounds like Earleâ€™s heart is in the right place, but heâ€™s taking on something new, at least for a ref who cut his teeth on the sweet science. "I think people have assumed that since I do the assigning I'm automatically going in the ring," said Earle. "But that would be very presumptuous and I'm not that stupid. If I'm not qualified Iâ€™m not doing it. On the other hand, if I am qualified, I feel I can do anything." Earle has been working since November with a number of boxing and extreme combat officials in order to get it right. "People just think I do boxing. But Iâ€™ve been around a lot of combat sports. I spent over a year with mixed martial arts to get it legalized. My one concern is that these fighters get in the ring, do what they can do and get out as safe as possible. Whether I have to bring in the devil himself I will do itâ€? â€| And in case you missed it, the

Associated Press

brings us news from Umm El Fahm, Israel, which is a good sign of boxingâ€™s unflagging universality. "

Riham Agabaria

has a left hook that will knock your socks off," the article reads. "Or your head scarf. Sparring in her hometown in northern Israel, the shy 15-year-old lets loose a strike that brushes back the traditional Muslim headdress of her opponent â€“ her younger sister

Fatma Agabaria

, who is forced to flee to the restroom to rearrange her hijab." During a time when womenâ€™s boxing is seeking to redefine itself in the post-

Christy Martin

era, during a time when the Israeli-Arab conflict shows no sign of resolution, Riham, panting from behind a light-blue head scarf after a two-hour workout, said, "I recommend every girl try boxing. It gives you confidence and teaches you how to protect yourself." With their "unusual hobby, Riham and her 13-year-old sister have blazed a trail for other religious Muslim girls in Israel." They have also sparked a debate within their own traditional society.

[There is nothing in Islam that specifically forbids women from boxing](#)

, but "many in this traditional hilltop town of 40,000 were skeptical when

Toufiq Agabaria

started training his daughters and, more troublingly, allowing them to fight boys." The girls' father is a former Israeli boxing champion, and frankly doesnâ€™t see what the fuss is about. "Sports is one thing," he said, "and religion is another. As long as it (boxing) is not opposed to the tradition of Islam, I think it is positive." He also pointed out that the Quran is full of tales of women in battle, including one involving the Prophet Muhammad's wife. That may be, but several relatives have "urged the girls to throw in the towel, saying boxing is unseemly for a Muslim girl and warning that no man will want to marry a woman boxer." "Because I love the sport so much," Fatma said, "no one can persuade me to stop."

In Boxing News: Rocky Anniversary, Extreme Referee, Israeli-Arab Boxing Sisters

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