The last time I spoke to Angelo Dundee, I told him that I saw a documentary produced by the English network BBC where he talked about Muhammad Ali and where Jake LaMotta spoke about the boxing business in the 1940s and 1950s. I told Angelo that I would love to interview the Raging Bull during my next visit to New York City and he said: *"Why wait until you go there? I will give you Jake's number. My friends are your friends."* Immediately after that, I called Mr. LaMotta and told him that I got the number from Angelo Dundee. The legendary middleweight champion, asked me:
"What can I do for you?"
My answer was:
"Give me an interview, I will keep you on the phone for just five minutes."
When he said yes, I was really excited; not only about getting an interview with a real boxing legend, but just for the pleasure of being able to talk with him.

Like many other people, I got to know about Jake LaMotta through the movie *Raging Bull.* When it was re-released, in 1980, I was 12 years old and couldn't care less about boxing. I bought the movie six or seven years later and was so impressed that I also bought a collection of 48 VHS tapes about the greatest fighters in history and LaMotta was one of them. The tape showed LaMotta's fights against Marcel Cerdan, Laurent Dauthuille, Eugene Hairston, Norman Hayes, Bob Murphy and Billy Kilgore. What I liked about the Bronx legend is that he threw hundreds of punches, got hit many times and never slowed down. Today, that could never happen: after ten consecutive unanswered punches, the referee would step in and declare the fight a TKO. That's only one of many differences between boxing in LaMotta's era and our times. Another major difference is how many times a boxer fights during the year. Today, six bouts in twelve months are considered a big deal. During LaMotta's first year as a professional, in 1941, he fought 20 times with a record of 16 wins, 3 losses and 1 draw. After 13 years in the ring, LaMotta's final record was made of 106 wars (that's what they were): 83 wins (30 KOs), 19 losses and 4 draws. Surprisingly, he was world middleweight champion for only one year, seven months and 29 days. That looks a short reign compared to some modern champions, but who will remember about them ten years from now? LaMotta is already in the history books and will be remembered by any and every boxing fan. That's because he won the title in an era when great warriors abounded, fought the greatest boxer in history six times (that was Sugar Ray Robinson, if you are too young to know) and always packed arenas.

Among today's champions, only a few remind me of Jake LaMotta, because of their willingness to take it and give it back without making a step backward or doing wrong things like holding and headbutting. I'm referring to Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales, Manny Pacquiao and Miguel Angel Cotto. I'm sure that for them it is a big compliment being compared to LaMotta, but don't tell it to the Bronx legend. Why? Let's hear what Jake LaMotta has to say.

"Among today's champions, I like nobody. Talking in general, I don't like what boxing has

become: they give world title shots to people with 20 fights of experience, the referee stops the fight after a cut over the eye, too many so-called champions find excuses to refuse fights. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, nobody even considered refusing a fight. We all needed to make money and were willing to fight even on short notice. Besides, nobody ever told us that fighting too often was risky and we didn't think about that. The first time I faced Fritzie Zivic, he had more than 100 fights. Can you name anybody, among today's boxers, who fought as much? I defeated Zivic three times and lost one." (Note: Fritzie's record was 128 wins, 35 losses and 7 draws before fighting La Motta for the first time. Zivic started as a welterweight and became word champion defeating the legendary Henry Armstrong. Zivic retired after 232 fights: 157 wins, 66 losses and 9 draws).

When I asked him about the heavyweights, LaMotta's answer didn't change:

"I like the old ones. The best were Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano and Muhammad Ali. I cannot choose one of them. All the other heavyweight champions, are way below them."

Maybe that's just a coincidence, but Angelo Dundee gave me the same answer. Like Angelo, the Raging Bull has Italian blood (his real name is Giacobbe). Unlike Angelo, who came to Italy so many times that he lost count, La Motta's first trip to Italy happened last year. Instead of travelling the well-trod tourist's itinerary – Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples – he chose to visit Sicily because that's where his father came from: *"My father was from Messina, while my mother was born in the United States from Napolitano parents. My dad talked about Sicily his whole life. I don't understand why I waited so long to go there. I really liked my time on that island."* Believe it or not, nobody knew about LaMotta's trip. A Sicilian journalist recognized him while LaMotta was drinking a cup of coffee in a sidewalk café in the small town of Bagheria (close to Palermo), asked him a couple of questions and shot a photo of him which was published by a national newspaper. Before any other journalist could try to contact the Raging Bull, he was back on a plane heading home to New York.

When I asked Mr. LaMotta about the best boxer he fought, he had no doubts: *"It was Ray Robinson. He was, by far, the greatest of them all. In my time, there were so many outstanding boxers who never won the world title. One of them was Tony Janiro. Everybody was scared to fight him, but I accepted immediately. I wanted to be recognized as the best and... I needed the money. In the other divisions, I liked world featherweight champion Willie Pep a lot. He would have crushed everybody today"*

The interview ended when I asked Mr. LaMotta about the Billy Fox affair: *"I answered that question a million times. When a journalist wants to talk about it, I tell him: goodbye and God bless you."* Right after that, he hung up the phone. I didn't call him back to get an answer, it would have been disrespectful. If Mr. LaMotta is reading this, I want to tell him that I consider it a huge honor to have spoken with the legendary Raging Bull.

Jake LaMotta

Born in New York City on July 10, 1921.

Record: 83 wins (30 KOs), 19 losses e 4 draws.

World middleweight champion from June 16, 1949 to February 14, 1951.

He won the title at Briggs Stadium, in Detroit, against Marcel Cerdan who quit on his stool at the beginning of the 10th round.

On July 12, 1950 at Madison Square Garden, LaMotta defended the title beating Tiberio Mitri on points.

On September 13, 1950 in Detroit, La Motta made his second defense with a KO 15 win over Laurent Dauthuille. The RING magazine called it the Fight of the Year..

On February 14, 1951 in Chicago, LaMotta lost the title to Ray Robinson by TKO 13.

The six wars against Ray Robinson

10 Rounds

October 2, 1942 at Madison Square Garden: Robinson won on points.

February 5, 1943 at Olympia Stadium in Detroit: Robinson won on points. During the 9th round, La Motta knocked down Sugar Ray.

February 26, 1943 again at Olympia Stadium: LaMotta won on points. In the 7th round, LaMotta knocked down Robinson. It was the first loss for Sugar Ray.

February 23, 1945 in New York: Robinson won on points.

12 Rounds

September 26, 1945 at Comiskey Park in Chicago: Robinson won on points.

15 Rounds

February 14, 1951 at Chicago Stadium: Robinson won by TKO 13. This bout was billed The Valentine's Day Massacre because of the huge number of punches absorbed by LaMotta… who never went down.