

A Case for Primo Carnera, Ray Mancini, and a Few Observers

Written by Aaron Tallent

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When the International Boxing Hall of Fame (IBHoF) announces its 2007 inductees this January, it is a sure bet that Roberto Duran, Pernell Whitaker, and Ricardo Lopez will be among the enshrinees. Who else goes in will be the subject of debate and discussion over the next few months.

I, myself, do not vote for the IBHoF inductees and have no idea who is on the ballot. However, here are a few fighters, two writers, and a photographer that deserve further consideration:

Primo Carnera: At first glance, this incites laughter. The Italian heavyweight is referenced by writers more as a plodding oaf than as a heavyweight champion. However, Carnera is the only linear heavyweight titleholder from John L. Sullivan to Muhammad Ali's second championship run who is not in the IBHoF. Carnera won the title in 1933 with a sixth-round knockout of Jack Sharkey and successfully defended the belt twice. Included in those wins is a 15-round decision over Tommy Loughran. Those two defenses are more than Max Schmeling, Jack Sharkey, Max Baer, and James J. Braddock – all the heavyweight champions between Gene Tunney and Joe Louis – accumulated COMBINED during their title runs. And not to diminish these fighters' accomplishments, but if the voters consider Baer and Braddock to be hall-of-famers, then Carnera deserves induction as well.

Ray Mancini: I know am not the first person to automatically assume that he was already in the IBHoF, only to be shocked to find that his name was not among the enshrinees. A whirlwind puncher, Mancini won the WBA Lightweight Title with a first-round knockout of Arturo Frias in 1982 and held it for two years, successfully defending the belt four times. His last successful defense was a third-round stoppage of hall-of-famer Bobby Chacon. Mancini also suffered close defeats to Alexis Arguello in 1981, and then – after a four-year layoff – to Hector Camacho in 1989. Since it is already an assumption that he is in the IBHoF anyway, inducting Mancini would generate little controversy.

Pat Putnam: Writing for Sports Illustrated from 1968 to 1995, the late Putnam may have been the most widely read boxing journalist in the country during that period. His vivid recreation of fights and unique angles on stories made for some of the greatest boxing writing of all time. Who can forget Putnam incorporating the hole Mike Tyson punched into the wall before his 1988 bout with Larry Holmes into his coverage of the fight. And descriptions like, "If there's a better chin in the world than [Aaron] Pryor's, it has to be on Mount Rushmore," etch themselves in a reader's memory forever. Putnam also pulled no punches in describing the fighters he covered. For his explanation of Ali's fight-not-to-lose performance against Ernie Shavers in 1977, Putnam wrote, "For Ali there are no more pitched battles, only well-spaced fire fights." But when Ali won the title for a third time with a 15-round decision over Leon Spinks in 1978, Putnam was the first to praise Ali's craftiness and to criticize Spinks and the incompetent preparation by his handlers. While his writing was unapologetic, it was always fair.

Putnam began covering boxing in 1960 when he worked for The Miami Herald. When he

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passed away in 2005, he was writing for The Sweet Science. His final work, a four-part piece on the Jack Johnson/James Jeffries 1910 heavyweight bout, was just as compelling as his articles for Sports Illustrated. Forty-five years of outstanding boxing journalism is worthy of a place in the IBHoF.

Neil Leifer: The picture of Ali standing over Sonny Liston is worthy of induction alone. But Leifer has many outstanding – and classic – photographs to his credit, including memorable pictures of Sugar Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran, and Evander Holyfield. If photographers receive greater prominence in the IBHoF, inducting Leifer makes perfect sense.

F.X. Toole: Granted, he only had one novel and one short story collection to his credit, but Toole's writing was true to the sport. More importantly, it was devoted to the fight game. There are very few fiction writers who solely wrote about boxing, and the ones who did do not have the impressive collection of work that Toole put together. If the IBHoF decides to enshrine a writer whose sole subject was boxing fiction, it could not choose a better inductee than Toole.

While these individuals may not warrant induction in 2007, there may be another year where enshrining them in the IBHoF is reasonable and feasible. I hope the voters will consider them when that time comes.