

## Ring 8 Helps Boxers In Need

Written by Robert Mladinich  
Monday, 27 August 2007 19:00

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About a month before his August 25th fight against Benito Fernandez, cruiserweight Bobby Gunn sent out a press release to announce that he would be donating a percentage of his purse to former three division champion Iran "The Blade" Barkley.

Gunn, who improved his record to 18-3 (15 KOS) with a second round knockout of Fernandez, had once been a chief sparring partner for Barkley. He said that he was disappointed by the fact that the boxing community was ignoring the financially strapped ex-champ.

"I feel that the boxing community should give back to him and other fighters in need," Gunn was quoted as saying. "My cousin saw Iran at a fight recently and knew he needed help. I felt it was my place to do something about it."

While Gunn also pointed out that "not enough current fighters elect to help out legends of the past," he still ruffled the feathers of Henry Wallitsch, a former heavyweight who serves as the President of Ring 8, Veteran Boxers Association (VBA), in New York.

Wallitsch is not afraid to tell it like he sees it, so he came out with both fists blazing.

"The kid (Gunn) is well-intentioned, but he got it wrong," said Wallitsch, who compiled a record of 13-13 (1 KO) during a career that spanned from 1957-66. Among the better known fighters he squared off against were Ernie Terrell, Bobby Halpern and the behemoth James J. Beattie (twice).

"Ring 8 has been around for more than 50 years, and all we do is help ex-fighters," he added.

On more than one occasion the organization has assisted Barkley, who they treat like family. They also currently pay for the monthly prescriptions of one former world champion, as well as the living expenses of a popular club fighter who is now in his eighties and in ill health.

Over the years they have raised money and contributed their own funds to have the body of Kid Gavilan exhumed from a potter's field and buried in a nice cemetery with a beautiful headstone. Mike Tyson contributed \$5,000 of the nearly \$25,000 needed for that project.

In conjunction with Steve Acunto's American Association for the Improvement of Boxing (AAIB), they also helped pay for a headstone for onetime heavyweight title challenger Tami Mauriello, as well as a life-size statue of Willie Pep that was placed in a restaurant in Pep's Connecticut hometown.

Over the years they have helped scores of indigent boxers get themselves together. Not once have they sent out a press release detailing their altruistic actions. As a newly elected board member, I can attest to their kindness.

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At one of my first board meetings, a former champion made a desperate plea for money to pay his rent. As the ex-pug started telling his tale of woe, Wallitsch cut him off to spare him any indignity.

“Just tell me what you need, Papa,” said Wallitsch. “Tell me how we can help you.”

When the fighter said he needed \$700 to avoid eviction, Wallitsch called for a vote by the board. After unanimous approval, he directed the bookkeeper to write a check for \$1,000. The check was then cashed by a Ring 8 member so cash could be placed in the fighter’s hands.

“That’s all we are about,” said Wallitsch. “It’s hard enough for a guy, or a girl, to come to us and ask for money. We are more than happy to help. We help anyone. That’s why we’re here. That’s what we do.”

There is an old proverb that states a good deed is no longer considered “good” once the do-gooder tells anyone about it. While Wallitsch agrees with that concept, he wants ex-fighters to know that Ring 8 is there for them.

“If we weren’t so silent about the good things we do, more ex-fighters would come to us,” he explained. “Maybe that kid (Gunn) never heard of Ring 8. We respect the privacy of fighters we help, but maybe we shouldn’t be so quiet. We want to help people. That’s the whole idea of the organization.”

Ring 8 was formed in 1954 by an ex-prizefighter named Jack Grebelsky, who believed in the adage that “charity begins at home.” It became the eighth subsidiary of what was then called the National Veteran Boxers Association. Ring 8’s motto hasn’t changed in over a half century: “Boxers Helping Boxers.”

Over the years the membership has included such luminaries as Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Sugar Ray Robinson, Rocky Graziano and Sandy Saddler.

Today its members include multiple division champion Emile Griffith, Vito Antuofermo and scores of other popular fighters from past decades. They include Joe Miceli, Bobby Bartels, Lenny Mangiapane and Johnny Breitenbruck.

Also on the board is noted trainer Tommy Gallagher, who appeared on the first two seasons of “The Contender” reality television show, and Tony Mazarrella, the proprietor of the Waterfront Crab House in Long Island City, where the organization’s monthly meetings are held.

No one can dispute the notion that Mazarrella, as well as the entire board, are a boxer’s best friends.

Recent guest speakers at the meetings have included Gaspar Ortega, current junior welterweight champion Paul Malignaggi, undefeated middleweight contender John Duddy, and noted author Peter Wood, a 1971 New York City Golden Gloves finalist who in February published or re-published two books: “Confessions of a Fighter: Battling Through the New York

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Golden Gloves” and “A Clenched Fist: The Making of a Golden Gloves Champion.”

They were published by Ringside Books and can be ordered online at: [ringsidebooks.com](http://ringsidebooks.com) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

“At Ring 8 you really see the heart and soul of what boxing is about,” said Wood, a troubled youth who credits boxing with saving his life. Now 54, he has been a high school English teacher for several decades.

“These guys look like rough customers, but they have the biggest of hearts,” he continued. “They fought their hearts out in the ring. Now they are using those big hearts to help fighters in need. It doesn’t get any better than that.”

Anyone wishing to make a tax-deductible donation to Ring 8 can do so by mailing a check to:

Veteran Boxers Association

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