Don Turner sensed what was coming as soon as he and his bloodied fighter returned to the locker room at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 23. John Duddy was still undefeated, although barely, but his big-money title shot against middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik had disappeared under a river of his own blood and an avalanche of punches he steadfastly refused to duck thrown at him by someone named Walid Smichet.

Turner knew someone would have to pay for this and he understood almost immediately it would be him. Boxing teaches you a lot of harsh lessons about human nature and if you've been around as long as Don Turner you've learned most of them the hard way. You've had to pay for them yourself.

"They didn't tell me until about three weeks ago, but I knew when the fight was over that I was gone,'' the veteran trainer of 19 world champions, including Larry Holmes, Evander Holyfield and Mike McCallum, said last week from his home in North Carolina. "After that fight they weren't treating me like the same guy. Every one of the three fights I worked with Duddy before Smichet I was Jesus. That fight I became the devil but they didn't have guts enough to tell me.

"They're great guys but the way they did things, they got no class. If they came up to me right after the fight it would have been one thing. That's not what they did.''

Instead Duddy's promoter, Eddie McLaughlin, and his matchmaker, Jim Borzell, began to talk with other trainers without yet having cut ties with Turner. Turner claims they did the same thing to Duddy's previous trainer when they brought him on board less than a year ago and, according to Turner, "They told me the same things about him that they're now saying about me.''

Once the move to Jermain Taylor's former trainer, Pat Burns, became official, McLaughlin told the BBC, "Don Turner has gone.'' That was true but not without a push, one that ironically Burns unfairly felt himself not so long ago from the people around Taylor.

About 2 ½ years ago, after leading Taylor to a 25-0 record, the undisputed middleweight championship and two wins over Bernard Hopkins, Burns was fired in the same fashion as Turner was, replaced by Emanuel Steward despite believing he had done as good a job as one could do, an opinion clearly supported by the record. Four lackluster performances later Steward was out, replaced by Taylor's amateur trainer and father-figure Ozell Nelson, amid the same kind of criticism now mumbled about Turner after Duddy was cut badly around both eyes by Smichet.

"We knew after the last fight that the change was necessary,'' McLaughlin was quoted saying after the move became official. "We had to do something. It wasn't a good performance and you can't afford at this level to be hot and cold.

"Of course, the buck stops with the boxer at the end of the day but I felt he wasn't being very informed between the rounds. He was left to figure it out for himself, wasn't given a steer at all.''

Turner listened to the words being re-read to him and bristled. He has long ago come to realize what all trainers eventually learn, which is that these days more than ever the sins of the fighter are visited upon the trainer. He is most often the one sacrificed now after a poor performance because that is easier for those around the periphery of the boxer than to tell him the sad truth of why he was just beaten. Or in Duddy's case, lacerated.

"What steering?'' Turner said, laughing as he thought about the words. "Dip to the left and those punches miss him. Dip to the right and they hit him. I told him that all during training 'Bing-bing-bing and dip.' Throw three punch combinations and dip to the left.

"A fighter like Duddy it's hard to teach him anything. Lean to the left and those right hands don't hit you. Lean to the right and they hit you. Is that difficult to understand? I trained him six weeks for that fight and asked him to throw three punch combinations and move his head. Move your head away from his right hand. How much steering do you need to do that?

"I didn't talk to him any differently that fight than I had the other three fights. I didn't talk any different than I did when he beat that guy who fought Hopkins twice (former British champion Howard Eastman). When that fight was over Eastman said at the press conference Duddy had to go back into the gym and work harder because if he got in with someone who could fight he'd get hurt.

"They keep thinking they can put Duddy in with all these stiffs but every time he's in with someone who can fight a little bit the same thing happens. At some point, the fighter has to do it.''

Duddy (24-0, 17 KO) is a bright and effervescent guy with Irish wit, good looks, reasonable punching power and an apparent aversion to defense. He has always been a guy who got hit too much and that has not changed regardless of who his trainer was, whether Turner or his predecessor, Harry Keitt. Burns is a solid teacher who has begun working with Duddy in Miami, preparing him for what is expected to be a less-than-formidable opponent June 28 at The Castle in Boston.

Like Turner, Burns has been involved in boxing for so many years that nothing really surprises him any more. That includes the dismissal of a good man like Turner or even of his own demise after shaping a fighter into the undefeated, undisputed middleweight champion of the world. In boxing these things happen, more today than ever. What becomes important then is how they are handled.

"I've known Don Turner a long time,'' Burns said from Miami. "He's a great guy and an excellent trainer. I've competed against him many times and my concern was always more with Don than his fighters. That's how much I think of him.

"When I was first approached about Duddy it was a year and a half ago. I had no idea who was

training him then (Keitt) and I didn't hear back so I let it go.

"All I knew was that Duddy was Irish and a tough kid who loved to come and war. I'd heard some good things about him and I knew the fans loved him. When his people contacted me again and asked if I was interested the first question I had was whose training him? They said 'No one.' I said, 'Isn't Don Turner his trainer?' They told me, 'No longer.'

"I told them I had no interest in pushing out another trainer. The kid was 24-0. Somebody must have been doing something right. But for whatever reason, and it's none of my business, it didn't work out for Don. I've been through it myself. I know how these things can happen.

"I remember when I had Glen Johnson. We got him to around 24-0, 25-0. He was about three fights from being ready to win a world title and his people decided to take a shot at Bernard Hopkins for $25,000. I told them not to but Glen had nothing back then so $25,000 sounded like a lot of money.

"I told them he wasn't ready. I said three or four more fights and he'd be ready for that level but not yet. They overrode my opinion. Glen fought his heart out but I had to stop the fight in the10th round. That was it for me. He netted $8,400 and it was my fault he got beat. Sometimes a change in trainers has nothing to do with what kind of trainer you are.

"Don Turner proved a long time ago he's an excellent trainer. He doesn't have to do anything else to establish that.''

Neither does Burns, who said he visited with McLaughlin, Borzell and Duddy after it was clear to him that Turner would not be back and "when all was said and done I felt it might be a fit. So here we are.''

Where they are is in Miami preparing for an as yet unnamed opponent who will be of little note when all is said and done. Who it won't be is Pavlik, who will instead defend the middleweight title from the challenge of a little known Welsh journeyman named Gary Lockett June 7 on HBO. That was supposed to be Duddy's slot but his eye was so badly cut and his performance so spotty against Smichet that most of the Garden crowd felt he didn't deserve the majority decision he received and Arum understood he simply couldn't sell Duddy to the public, or to HBO, as a viable challenger any more after that.

"It's how the fighter responds that makes the trainer,'' Turner said of that night. "You can be the best trainer in the world but if the fighter doesn't respond that don't make a difference.

"The first three fights with Duddy all I got was praise for how he looked. The fighter in the dressing room after the fight said he was sorry. He said he got caught up in things and wanted to please the people. I told him whatever he said wasn't going to change what happened so we learn from it and move on. I wasn't all over him.

"A lot of times a guy does the things you ask in the gym but when he gets hit and pressured he goes back to what he's comfortable with. It takes a lot of concentration to do the right thing

under pressure. It was easy to blame me instead of going to the fighter and saying, ‘Why didn’t you fight the way you did the last fight?’ They used to think I was a musician. Now they think Pat’s a musician. That’s how it goes today. Fans should not manage fighters but that’s what you got.

“Pat’s a great guy. He’s a very good trainer. But if he had problems with that guy imagine the problems he’d have with a guy like Kelly Pavlik.’’

That is no longer Don Turner’s problem, of course. Now it’s up to Burns to bring Duddy back to the where he can again even be talked about as a challenger for Pavlik. To get that done Burns must succeed where Turner and his predecessor could not. He must convince John Duddy that your best defense is NOT your offense. Your best defense is defense. Your best defense is learning how to move your head. Not just in the gym but when the lights are bright, the crowd is roaring and your thoughts are swimming. Then, most of all, you need to steer yourself.

“I’m working his butt off to improve some of those things,’’ Burns said. “He seems to learn quickly. You show him something and he practices it. You go back to it and he remembers and can execute it. But I know the gym is one thing and the fight is something else.

“If he listens I believe he can improve. If he doesn’t, then it won’t matter what I tell him.’’

Pat Burns, like Don Turner, is a realist. He knows what a trainer can do and what he cannot. As adept as he is, Pat Burns can’t fight for John Duddy. Neither could Don Turner. More importantly, they can’t duck for him either. He’s going to have to steer himself when it comes to that.