

The Florida Hall Welcomes Inaugural Inductees

Written by Rick Folstad
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When they got together last month at Butch Flansburg's house in Tampa, all they were hoping to do was draw enough people to their first-ever event to keep the newly-formed Florida Boxing Hall of Fame alive.

A Hall of Fame had been tried before in Florida back in the 1970s, but when some of the members died, so did the idea.

Sitting around the Flansburg's dining room table, the group of five started making plans for the FBHOF's inaugural dinner and - hopefully - fund-raiser. Early estimates put the break-even point at somewhere near 75 diners.

"If we can draw that many, we should just about break even," said Flansburg, the president and man behind the new FBHOF. "Hopefully, we'll draw even more than that."

Six weeks later on a Saturday night at the Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel in downtown Tampa, more than 275 boxing fans, fighters, promoters, friends and family flooded a large banquet room to celebrate Florida boxing and the 22 members (plus three special award winners) of the inaugural class of the FBHOF. It was a hot dinner ticket. If you came hoping to buy one at the door, you went home hungry.

"We had no idea we would have that kind of turnout," said Flansburg, who is also president of the National Boxing Association. "At the beginning we had reserved one room (at the hotel) but then ticket sales went crazy. A week before the dinner, my wife (Kathy, who serves as FBHOF secretary/treasurer) said we had to go into the second banquet room. I said 'great, but will we fill it?' We were still getting calls for tickets right up to the day of the dinner."

They filled it.

Apparently, the fight game is alive and doing pretty well in Florida.

Some of the boxing greats in attendance who will be officially inducted into the FBHOF in November included Angelo Dundee, Dr. Ferdie Pacheco, former heavyweight champ Pinklon Thomas, trainer Jimmy Williams, referees Max Parker Jr. and Brian Garry and matchmaker Johnny Bos.

"Saturday evening was one of those surreal, Rod Serling moments like back in the days of the Twilight Zone," said Garry, who, along with being an inductee is the FBHOF event coordinator. "It was happening right before your eyes and you could see it, hear it, feel it and even taste it. But for some reason it seemed almost like a dream. There was so much energy in the air."

During a photo shoot of the inductees standing next to a huge cake with their names listed on it and a set of boxing gloves made of red frosting, someone suggested to Dundee that he "cut the

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glove.“

“I never did anything like that,” Dundee said, smiling.

Dundee had plenty of reasons to smile. Five of his former fighters - Luis Manuel Rodriguez, Ralph Dupas, Willie Pastrano, Florentino Fernandez and Thomas - are among the inductees.

“You have to be happy with the response we got,” said boxing trainer Steve Canton, vice-president of the FBHOF and one of the inductees chosen from a list of 85 candidates. “Florida has always needed a boxing hall of fame. We finally got one. I’m not really surprised at the turnout. Florida is a boxing state. I’m over-joyed by the support. The thing about Florida is we have a rich field of candidates to choose from in the future.”

Of the 22 inductees, seven are being honored posthumously. They are Pastrano, Rodriguez, Dupas, historians Hank Kaplan and Irv Abramson, promoter Chris Dundee and manager/promoter Marty Cohen whose son, Sam, is a vice president of the FBHOF.

In honor of the seven, they held a traditional 10 count using a ring bell.

“Ten years from now the thing I’ll remember most is the absolute silence shared during the 10-count,” Garry said. “There was all that excitement and then all of a sudden, that defining silence. It struck me like a lightening bolt.”

Others to be inducted are announcer Mark Beiro; fighter Wilfredo Vazquez; boxing executive Bobby Goodman; Dr. Allan Fields; promoter Felix “Tuto” Zabala Sr.; and boxing writer Rick Folstad.

In addition to the inductees, three Florida boxing promoters were honored at the dinner and received special awards. They were Terry Trekas, Pete Fernandez and Phil Alessi.

Along with the new inductees there were several future inductees present, including former light-heavyweight champ Antonio Tarver of Tampa; former light-heavyweight champ Glen Johnson of Miami; former lightweight champ Nate Campbell of Tampa; former world champ Hector “Macho” Camacho; light-heavyweight contender Freeman Barr of Naples; and Christy Martin, one of the better known and more popular woman boxers in the country and a future candidate for the FBHOF.