

Angelo Dundee To Enter Florida Hall Of Fame

Written by Rick Folstad

Tuesday, 10 November 2009 19:00

Funny thing about Angelo Dundee. Time has never passed him by.

Oh, it's tried. Pile on enough sweet memories over the years and it would be easy to slip into the past and stay there until someone tapped you on the shoulder and reminded you it's today, not yesterday. But Dundee doesn't have to worry. He doesn't need reminding. He's a walking, talking ambassador to boxing's past, but he fits in real well with boxing's present. Yesterday? Dundee says that's history. Today? Well, that's a gift. Tomorrow? He calls that a mystery.

"I work with young people so I have to think young," Dundee said from his home in Tampa Bay, where he's lived for three years after moving here from Miami to be closer to his children and grandchildren. "When you work with a fighter, you can't make him think like you. You don't want him to be an old fogey. You want him to think now. And I live for now. I don't live on what I did years ago. You can't live on that."

At 88, Dundee is all about today. And on this day, he's going to be attending a local fight at the Hyatt Regency in Tampa.

"I go to all the fights," he said. "I love them. I'm in the position now that if somebody asks me a question about a fighter, I can tell them a little something about them. I even watch all the fights on TV. I'm jumping all over the place. Tampa is a good fight town. I'm like a pig in slop."

Dundee will be one of 22 inaugural inductees going into the Florida Boxing Hall of Fame this Sunday in Tampa.

"This is a big thrill for me," he said. "They're putting me and my brother (the late Chris Dundee) in the Hall. And they're putting five of my fighters in there. This is a big kick for me."

Three of his fighters - who he trained at the old Fifth Street Gym in Miami Beach - are going into the Hall posthumously. They are Luis Manuel Rodriguez, Ralph Dupas and Willie Pastrano. The other two are Florentino Fernandez and former heavyweight champion Pinklon Thomas, who lives in Orlando.

"I've known these guys from the beginning," Dundee says. "Pinklon Thomas and I are real tight. I scared the shoot out of him when he was trying to get off the junk. I told him 'forget my name, don't ever call me again.' I scared the hell out of him and he got off (the junk)."

He met Pastrano and Dupas in New Orleans when he brought two of his own fighters into the Big Easy from Miami Beach. And they ended up fighting Pastrano and Dupas.

When their trainer asked Dundee if he would work with the two New Orleans fighters back in Miami Beach, Dundee said it would be his pleasure.

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“My wife used to cook for those two kids in Miami Beach. That’s how far we go back,” Dundee says. “My wife was Mrs. Dundee to Muhammad Ali. My wife knew all the fighters. We’ve been doing it together for 57 years, the wife and I, so we like each other a little bit. We get along all right. My wife is my favorite fighter.”

A walking history book on boxing, Dundee will tell you he was in the corner with Florentino Fernandez when he knocked out Jose Torres in 1963. And he was there when Fernandez broke Gene Fullmer’s arm with a left hook in 1961. Fullmer still fought two rounds with a broken arm. And won.

“That’s how tough (Fullmer) was,” Dundee says.

Along with training and managing, Dundee has also done some color analyst work with both Gil Clancy and Howard Cosell.

When Oscar Bonavena fought Karl Mildenberger in September 1967, Cosell saw it ending different from what Dundee saw.

“Howard was under the opinion that Mildenberger was going to kick (Bonavena’s) butt,” Dundee says. “But I said, ‘No, Howard. Mildenberger is going to get knocked out.’ I said Bonavena’s got a great left hook. And it works with southpaws.’ ”

Dundee then reminds me what he told me a week earlier when we were at Miguel Cotto’s last press conference in Tampa.

“Remember,” he says to me. “I told you the left hook works with southpaws and the left hook will work with Cotto. There you go.”

Bonavena didn’t exactly knock Mildenberger out. But he did knock him down four times.

Asked if he missed going to the gym, Dundee said he’s busier now than when he had 16 fighters in his stable.

“I’m busy as I can be. I have my book (My View From the Corner), I’m making appearances, and I’m doing a documentary called, ‘Angelo Dundee: It don’t cost nothing to be nice.’ I’m very busy.”

The documentary is based on the Dundee concept that if you can’t say anything “decent” about a human being, keep your mouth shut.

“I teach my fighters that wherever they go, they should never leave a bad taste. That way you can always go back. One of my best friends, Gene Kilroy, a very close friend of Muhammad Ali’s, used to say, ‘Angelo Dundee would have something good to say about Charles Manson.’ That’s me.”

It’s getting late now and the Tampa fight is just a couple hours away.

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“I’ll be there,” he says. “And maybe some 6-foot-9 guy will come up to me and ask me to train him. I’m ready.”

For more information on the FBHOF Induction weekend (Nov. 13-15) go to www.floridaboxinghalloffame.com