

Rest In Peace, Arthur Mercante Sr.

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 09 April 2010 17:00



The sweetest compliment you can pay a boxing referee following a fight is this:

"I didn't even notice he was in the ring.

Arthur Mercante Sr. , who passed away in Westbury, Long Island, New York on the morning of Saturday, April 10 at the age of 90, was that sort of ref, somebody who did his thing, more than capably, and never overshadowed the boxers. He was the firm, fair arbiter from the 1950s to the 2000s, and entered the International Hall of Fame in Canastota in 1995, the first active ref to be so honored.

If you watched the third Muhammad Ali-Ken Norton scrap from Yankee Stadium on June 28, 1976, one of the three people scoring the tussle, for Ali, was the agile Mercante. If you viewed the first Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier fight at Madison Square Garden on March 8, 1971, you saw the man, not prone to excessive handling of the principals. If you saw the second Floyd Patterson-Ingemar Johansson bout, you saw Mercante Sr., trim and dapper, counting out Johansson in round five at the Polo Grounds on June 20, 1960.

Mercante, who leaves behind his wife Gloria and four sons, Glenn, James, currently practicing ref Arthur Jr., and Thomas, had a handle on what makes a good ref: "Know when to stop the fight, stay out of the picture and be there when you have to be there," he said.

The ex Navy man, who moved to Brooklyn from Brockton, Massachusetts at age seven, wasn't too shabby himself as a practitioner, reaching the semifinals of the New York Golden Gloves in 1938. A 1942 graduate of New York University, he retired as a ref in 2001, having refereed 145 world title bouts. His name was the gold standard among refs during Ali's golden age, the 1970s, and into the 1980s. Mercante, who worked for the park and recreation department of Nassau County (LI), was the third man in the ring for bouts involving Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard and Sugar Shane Mosley. "I'm pretty sure I'm the only referee to have refereed bouts involving all three of those Sugars," Mercante told the New York Times.

TheSweetScience sends most sincere condolences to the Mercante family and friends. Please feel free to leave a memory of Mercante in our comment section.