

Interview with Harold Lederman

Written by Jim Amato

Sunday, 07 September 2003 18:00

What would an HBO boxing telecast be like without the voice and input of guest judge Harold Lederman? Harold has become a mainstay with the popular HBO broadcast team. He lends an opinionated yet objective view from an expert and an astute observer. Like a good umpire he "calls them as he sees them." No hold barred. The voice that you hear has been judging boxing matches for close to forty years! Believe me, he knows what he is talking about.

When I called Harold to conduct this interview, I quickly learned that he was a man who had a true passion for the sport. It wasn't just a job to him. He was a fan first and foremost. That is what led him into judging. He was still a fan but now he has just had a better seat. He has come up through the ranks and paid his dues from the four and six rounder in small clubs to the main events in major venues. If he hasn't seen it yet, it's doubtful that it is going to happen. Yet Harold seem to approach every fight with a fresh outlook. It has given him a chance to travel and meet some of the most influential people in boxing.

In the whole time I talked with Harold he did not utter a negative word about anyone as a person. He is a true ambassador for the sport. Harold was born on January 26, 1940 in the Bronx where he was raised. Among his childhood friends were Vinnie Rinnone, Joe Santarpis, and Tony Perez. All three along with Harold are highly respected in the boxing community. Harold had nothing but immense praise for his long time buddies. You could hear the pride in Harold's voice when he spoke of his wife Eileen and their daughters Julie and Iris. Success has not gone to Harold's head. He's your everyday boxing fan who just accepts that fate has handed him one hell of a great job!

When did you start judging boxing matches?

HL-Around 1965, amateur fights. I loved boxing. Before judging I went to as many fights as I could.

When did you start judging pro bouts?

HL-Around 1967.

Did you ever box?

HL-No, just a few street scraps as a kid.

Did you ever work as a referee?

HL-Never really had the interest.

What was the first major fight you judged?

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HL-The rematch between Ken Buchanan and Ismael Laguna. Laguna's manager Cain Young objected everybody. I found out at the last minute that I was judging the match.

The decision of the New Jersey commission to only let New Jersey residents work as officials took a lot of work away. What was your take on that?

HL-I was not happy about it. I didn't understand the reasoning. I can live in New York and be a pharmacist in New Jersey but not a boxing judge? It didn't make sense to me. It was political so there was not a whole lot I could do about it. I just accepted it and moved on.

How did you hook up with HBO?

HL-I was friendly with Ross Greenberg who was in charge of boxing at HBO. I had watched a fight on HBO one night and to be honest with you, the announcers must have been watching a different fight than I was. I just thought looking at it from a judge's point of view that they were missing a lot of things going on.

I conveyed this to Ross and he said he'd think about it. I had really forgotten all about it but later he called and invited me to a guest judge at an upcoming fight. I think it took me about three seconds to say yes!

What was your first main event on HBO?

HL-Plinkton Thomas vs. Trevor Berbick, March 22, 1986. Thomas was a huge favorite and I told Eileen, watch Thomas will take out Berbick early. Then no one would hear too much between rounds from me and my chance at HBO would possibly come to an end. Well Berbick had Eddie Futch in his corner and Eddie mapped out a great fight plan and got Berbick to follow it. As the rounds progressed I was able to show my card with Berbick in the process of an upset. In the end I had Berbick winning and he did. He won the title in an upset and my tenure at HBO was on its way.

What was your favorite fight?

HL-The best fight I ever saw was Wilfredo Gomez-Lupe Pintor in New Orleans. I was a judge for that.

Who was your favorite fighter?

HL-Bad Bennie Briscoe. Hagler-Briscoe was one of my favorite fights. I had nothing to do with it. I was just there to watch.

What were some of the best fights you worked for HBO?

HL-Hagler-Leonard, the Bowe-Holyfield trilogy, Lewis-Tyson, Lewis-Mercer, Roy Jones-James Toney, Danny Romero-Johnny Tapia, Barrera-Kennedy McKinney, both Ward-Gatti fights, Ward-Shea Neary, Foreman-Moorer, Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Diego Corrales, and

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Hopkins-Trinidad.

Your daughter Julie is now a boxing judge. How did that come about?

HL-Julie was a very shy girl but I took her to a lot of fight shows with me. She got to meet many boxers and watched a lot of fights. She really began to understand the sport and she has become a very capable judge. She is a WBC judge and very respected. She was recently a judge at a very high profile boxing card in Japan. A very important assignment for her.

Who are some of your favorite referees?

HL-Larry Rozadilla comes to mind and Arthur Mercante Sr. My friend Tony Perez has been involved in several major fights. Larry Hazzard was a great one. Chuck Hassett, Lou Fillipo and Joe Cortez.

You mentioned to me that you judged a major bout in my hometown of Cleveland. Do you remember who fought?

HL-It was Michael Moorer and Ramzi Hassan for the vacant W.B.O. light heavyweight title. That day Michael Moorer was a truly awesome fighter!

I have given you a list of fourteen names and asked you to just make a short comment to describe them. What were your comments?

HL - OK, here goes:

Muhammad Ali - "The Greatest."
Mike Tyson - "The Badest Man on The Planet"
Jim Lampley - "Boxings Greatest Commentator."
Larry Merchant - "A Great Analyst."
Emmanuel Steward - "Blackie Bimstein."
Chris Byrd - "He can do more with what he has than anyone who has ever lived."
Don King - "Boxing's Greatest Promoter."
Bob Arum - "Boxing's Most Brilliant Promoter."
Oscar DeLaHoya - "I wish I was him."
George Foreman - "The only man I know with two great lives ten years apart."
Roy Jones, Jr. - "Boxing's Number One Pound For Pound."
Evander Holyfield - "The Consummate Warrior."
Riddick Bowe - "I was so proud to call him my friend."
Sugar Ray Leonard - "He drank from the fountain of eternal youth."

Harold, thank you so much for your time.

HL-Jim, you are very welcome.

In closing I would just like to say that talking to Harold Lederman was as easy as discussing

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boxing with someone at a neighborhood tavern. It was truly my pleasure to have this conversation with him.