

"It Was Always Great With Gil" Homage To Clancy....BORGES

Written by Ron Borges
Friday, 01 April 2011 10:44



There used to be a sign on the wall of the old gym on West 28th Street in lower Manhattan that illustrated the kind of guy Gil Clancy was.

It read: "PLEASE DON'T BE AFRAID TO THROW GARBAGE IN WASTE BIN.'

Nobody knew for sure if Clancy put it there or not. It could have been his long-time partner, Howie Albert. It could have been the guy who owned the place. But most likely it was Clancy because that's the kind of double-edged wit he had.

That's not what made him one of boxing's greatest trainers and managers. He had other skills for that. But it's what made him one of the grand guys in boxing.

Gil Clancy could tell a story, pull your leg and teach you something new with equal alacrity. When he was done you were usually smiling and always had more understanding of the situation than you did before.

The light went out in Clancy's eyes Thursday morning at an assisted living facility in Lynbrook, N.Y., out on the island only miles from where he grew up in Queens. Boxing is a lesser place today for it but a greater place for having had him in its midst for so long.

It's not a sadder place because at 88 Gil Clancy lived a full life, packing more into his time here

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than anyone could ever hope for. Yet there's a hole in boxing now that no one is going to fill.

They don't make many trainers like Gil Clancy any more, guys who are teachers and not just someone who bought a towel and walked into a gym claiming he was a trainer. He was a teacher by trade, the owner of a Master's degree in education from NYU, and he had a former Phys. Ed teacher's eye for developing a young athlete into whatever the best of him could be.

A successful amateur boxer in college and the Army, Clancy came home to New York and began working as a teacher by day and a trainer at a PAL gym in Queens at night in the 1950s. As these things often do, one kid led to another and next thing you knew he had a pupil named Ralph "Tiger" Jones and his Phys. Ed days were behind him.

Jones never became a champion but he beat a few, including Sugar Ray Robinson, Kid Gavilan and Joey Giardello. He became a regular on televised boxing in the '50s and always standing behind him was Clancy, who by the time he'd left the corner for the broadcast booth 30 some odd years later had put together a Hall of Fame career.

He worked with Muhammad Ali, Jerry Quarry, Ken Buchanan, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Gerry Cooney and came out of retirement to help Oscar De La Hoya learn his trade but he was most remembered for two guys – Rodrigo Valdes and Emile Griffith, great fighters both.

Griffith was perhaps his finest student, a kid he found in a factory who became welterweight and middleweight champion during a 20-year career. He started with Clancy and he ended with him and decades later, when they were both fighting old age. They would go together to the International Hall of Fame induction each June, two old friends who once had shared a dream and lived it.

Clancy was a realist and a funny one. Asked once, by a young sportswriter trying to figure out the odd angles of boxing, why a particularly inept fighter stuck with the sport Clancy smiled at what the young man didn't know and enlightened him in a sentence.

"He's a fighter because he's too lazy to go to work," Clancy growled. Then he smiled. He knew he was right. Years later, the writer understood.

Clancy led Griffith through some of the darkest times a boxer can face after he'd beaten Benny Paret to death. It is believed to be the first time a death in the ring was nationally televised and when it happened again a year later boxing all but disappeared from the small screen until 1970.

It was the third fight between them and Paret had what Griffith wanted, the welterweight title. Paret nearly knocked Griffith out in the sixth round that dark night of March 24, 1962, but Clancy told him in the corner what to expect the next round and to stay close to Paret and throw punches on the inside to keep him off and keep referee Ruby Goldstein conscious of the fact he was fighting back.

By the 12th round the roles had reversed and after getting Paret in trouble Griffith hit him 18 times in six seconds as the already unconscious champion squatted in the corner, one arm

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trapped behind the turnbuckle so he couldn't fall. By the time Goldstein got between them, Paret had slumped toward the floor, the life leaking out of him.

In a sense he took Griffith with him. Although he would fight on and even win the middleweight title Griffith was never a finisher after that and Clancy knew it. He also knew why and so, like any great teacher, he worked with what he had rather than demanding from Griffith that which he could not give.

That was the kind of keen eye Clancy had and the kind of understanding a great trainer needs. You don't train Joe Frazier and Rodrigo Valdez the same way. Clancy innately knew that but he also possessed a vast storehouse of knowledge about the small things that make a fighter dangerous and he could pass that on better than most of his fellow tradesman in the gym. Yet Clancy was more than a trainer. He was, as Top Rank matchmaker Bruce Trampler said, "a real Renaissance man. He could do everything in the sport and do it well."

Twice named Manager of the Year, Clancy took over as matchmaker at Madison Square Garden for Teddy Brenner in 1977. Trampler worked with him there for three years until Clancy left in 1980 to become half of one of broadcasting's greatest boxing teams, joining forces with Tim Ryan at CBS.

Soon Clancy had won the Sam Taub Award for excellence in boxing broadcasting, giving him a pretty clean sweep of things once he'd added his Hall of Fame ring to his trophy collection.

Often at his side was Bob Arum, who staged many of the sport's biggest promotions with Clancy behind the microphone and, more importantly, in a restaurant somewhere in Europe.

"Gil approved fights at CBS in those days and I'd call and tell him I had Victor Galindez fighting Eddie Mustafa or something and he'd say, 'That's an all right fight, I guess,'" Arum recalled with a chuckle. "Then I'd say we're going to put it in Monte Carlo and he'd say, 'What a great fight that's going to be!' We had so many great times together. We'd build a whole summer boxing schedule around the Tour de France.

"Gil was one of my dearest friends. I'm not sad because the memories he left me with will be with me forever."

Not all of those came in boxing. Arum and Clancy were partners in several race horses including one called Merchant of Baghdad. According to Arum, the only winner was a horse named Virginia Reel, who finally got them in the winner's circle on a day they both laughed about for years.

"It was pouring rain at Aqueduct," Arum recalled. "It was late in the day. Like the 10th race or something and Virginia whatever his name wins the race. You'd of thought we won the Kentucky Derby. We go charging down to the winner's circle, drenched, mud in our shoes and the cuffs of our pants, to see this cockamamie horse. It was always great with Gil."

It was Arum who coerced Clancy out of retirement to work with young De La Hoya and his then

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trainer Robert Alcazar. Clancy stayed in the shadows, teaching both his pupils without making either feel like he'd rode in to save the day.

Everything worked well until the night De La Hoya was robbed of the decision in the Felix Trinidad fight and lost the right to complain because he fought the last few rounds as if they were a track meet. Later he would dismiss Clancy without ever facing him, one last disappointment in a sport that gives you plenty of them. Clancy said little about that experience, choosing instead to believe anyone who knew anything about what happened. And they did.

"I'd rate him slightly behind Eddie Futch, who I think is the greatest trainer who ever lived, but so much better than the trainers today except for Freddy Roach," Arum said of Clancy. "Gil was a really great trainer. Very intelligent and he had the skills to communicate. And he was great in the corner.

"He was a sensational broadcaster too. He and Tim Ryan made a great, great team. And he was a handsome SOB. He had to fight the women off.

"I remember once we were at a fight and a stripper named Edy Williams (who made soft porn movies in the '70s and ran naked into the ring in New Orleans when Ali fought a rematch with Leon Spinks) was after him. She was crazy for Gil. She's chasing him one night, 'Gil! Gil! I love you, Gil.'"

If you ever heard him call a fight on CBS or saw him work the corner or, most of all, ever went up that rickety old elevator to the fifth floor of the Telestar Gym on West 28th between the button manufacturer and the fur company and paid a visit, you felt the same way.

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Radam G says:

Truth da ArchMasterscribe Ron B's copy! Gil "da kill, always work and alway will," hearing that you are gone, so many tears we spill. I know what you're saying! "Stop all that crying." Okay, Gil "da kill...", we will! Knowing that you are always in our hearts still. Ten loud BEATS from our heart in honor of a GREAT ONE. Holla!

publius says:

Nice article on the late Gil Clancy. Like many other die-hard boxing fans, I remember him mostly from his days at CBS as a blow-by-blow boxing commentator, along with Tim Ryan. Boy, not too many boxing trainers have made the successful transition from being a trainer to calling fights, but that goes to show how talented he really was. I was 13 years old when i saw the Ray Mancini-Duk Koo Kim fight in 1982. What a memorable event it was listening to Ryan and Clancy call the fight that tragic day. I wish boxing could somehow go back to those days, when up-and-coming fighters had to learn their craft on public television before they could even think

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of being on PPV. When boxing on public television died around that time, so did our appreciation for great announcing crews like Ryan and Clancy. I could think of a dozen other great fights he announced during his career (Simon Brown vs. Tyrone Trice, Barry McGuigan vs. Stevie Cruz, Roberto Duran vs. Iran Barkley, etc..). He will sorely be missed.

Great article once again.

May he rest in peace.