There's nothing easy about managing a professional boxer, if you intend to do it the right way. The feel-good story of the year in this business involves a manager who took a chance on a fighter the sport had cast aside, and how he helped that "nobody" overcome odds and obstacles to become a "somebody" at long last.

The boxing manager has become, for the most part, an endangered species over the last twenty years or so. As promoters ventured beyond just staging events and packaging them for television, and became knee-deep in the ‘steering’ of talent, there was less of a role for the manager, both as a decision-maker and influential player in the general machinery of the business. With the reticence of promoters to give featured fighters work unless their promotional rights are tied up, there is no ‘shopping’ to be done and less and less leverage when it comes to choosing opponents.

As a result, and with very few exceptions, the manager's function has been reduced to one of the following categories:

1) A ‘scout’ who signs a fighter with the sole purpose of immediately plugging him into a promotional contract with somebody, then puts his job on 'auto-pilot' while the promoter makes all the decisions.

2) Somebody who actually works for the promoter or is related to him in some way.

3) A guy with some money to burn who looks at the whole thing as something of a hobby.

4) A guy with some money who lays out for the fighter's house, car, and other living expenses and has no clue that he'll never get his investment back.

5) A gym owner who winds up with a fighter just by virtue of the fact that he is a gym owner, but otherwise has little in the way of connections.

6) Someone who possesses no other motivation than to conspire with others in an effort to make more money than the fighter - here, there, and everywhere.

7) Someone who meets a distressed fighter in a gym or elsewhere, befriends him, and tries to help him out but doesn't quite know how.

It would be fair to say that about two decades ago, I fell into Category #7. I had a part-time relationship with the game, writing about it, on and off, for a few years. One night I was in a bar and I noticed something very familiar about the guy drinking next to me. Finally I figured out that it was Teddy Mann, at one time a ranked middleweight who had made numerous appearances on ESPN and a couple on NBC. I introduced myself to him, and it just so happened that a mutual friend of ours had brought him to that bar. So we got to talking. Then we got around to

drinking Long Island Iced Teas. Then, as we were both presumably sloshed (the legendary oddsmaker Bob Martin once told me, 'When you're drunk, you usually can't tell when someone else is drunk', and he proved to be right), Teddy tells me, "Hey, I need a manager."

And so it was settled, sometime around 4 AM.

Precisely WHAT I was managing him at was nebulous, at least at first. In those days I liked to drink a bit. Don't get me wrong; I was never as bad as George W. Bush, but I was known to imbibe now and then. Teddy was a lot of fun to hang out with; we staked out a couple of regular watering holes and generally raised hell. We stayed out all night most of the time and once in a while even talked boxing. Teddy was very easygoing, but he also had a temper, and it came to the surface sometimes when he drank. On one occasion, he discovered he had lost his watch, which his late father had given him and thus had tremendous sentimental value. He obviously didn't know what had happened to it, so he simply went ballistic. He thought it might be in the lost and found, so he went to the office of this nightclub we were in and nearly tore the door off its hinges.

One time we were out till the wee hours partying, and I had to go to work in the morning. A casting director I knew had gotten me a gig as an extra on a new NBC series called "Miami Vice" and I had a 7 AM call at a location where they were doing that day's shoot. I got there on time all right, but that's because I arrived straight from our last stop of the evening, with Teddy in tow. I actually tried to get him on the sheet for the day, but as it turned out, they didn't need either one of us (I got paid anyway - that's the beauty of show business).

Word must have gotten around the gyms that Teddy was staying in Florida, because one day I got a call from a matchmaker in Fort Lauderdale named Norm Schulberg, who explained that he was putting a show together for ex-featherweight champ Pete Scalzo's son, an aspiring promoter, and he'd be willing to put Teddy into the main event, against an opponent he could beat, if he'd accept short money.

How short? Well, $750.

That was a little shorter than I would have expected, but my fighter said okay.

Teddy was what you would call a high-level middleweight opponent. He had fought a lot of the tough 160-pounders on the east coast, including Bennie Briscoe, Ernie Singletary, Vinnie Curto, Bobby Czyz and John LoCicero, among others. Cable TV gave him a break; he made great fights and never quit, often absorbing a pasting, whether it was in victory or defeat. So he continued to get work on television. A ten-round decision win over world-rated Robbie Epps on NBC in March of 1982 got him installed as the #9 world contender in the WBA ratings, but after losing to a succession of contenders - James "Hard Rock" Green, John Collins, Doug DeWitt, Robbie Sims and Juan Domingo Roldan - his career was effectively at a standstill.

And so I started to plot the grand comeback.

Teddy had put on some weight. Schulberg asked me how he stood in that department, and I

told him Mann weighed about 169 pounds. I asked him about the opponent, Rocky Fabrizzio. "Well, he's about 150," Schulberg said, "but don't worry. We can stuff some rocks in the guy's pockets at the weigh-in."

Well, that was already a slick managerial move on my part. And I didn't even have to do anything.

I was pretty excited, and anxious to get started setting up the interviews, putting my fighter in the gym, and hanging out my shingle as a ‘boxing manager’.

Teddy told me he was going to take a quick trip to New Jersey to see his son. Then he would come back and start training for the fight.

I never saw him again.

And so there it was - in my initial effort as a manager, I couldn't even get ‘on the board’.

Years later, I was talking to Cedric Kushner when he mentioned the name of the first fighter he ever handled - a fellow named Teddy Mann.

Teddy, it appears, had been a high-maintenance project for him. He used to call Cedric late at night, because he would need a washer-dryer or a refrigerator or something like that. And Cedric, a concert promoter who hadn't been properly indoctrinated into the boxing business yet, would buy it for him.

So I guess you could say I got off cheap.

Shortly after Teddy disappeared on me, I got another chance to take a fighter under my wing.

Robert Pew, a hard-hitting middleweight out of South Carolina, had chalked up nine straight wins in Florida. My friend Brad Jacobs was the matchmaker for Phil Alessi, the promoter in Tampa, and he was running out of opponents for Pew. Well, I had one. His name was Jean-Pierre Dawe, and believe it or not, I met him in the same bar I met Teddy Mann. Dawe, a short, stocky guy with a karate background, was not in the same league as Mann as a fighter. In fact, he was almost completely devoid of boxing skill. But like Teddy, he was tough as nails, had a great chin, and was utterly fearless. Known as "Jonathan O'Hara" around New Jersey, he was once plucked out of an Atlantic City casino on an hour's notice to fight once-beaten Indianapolis junior middleweight named Donald King, and with just four pro fights under his belt, he went the full ten-round distance.

Against Pew, Dawe took an amount of punishment that was painful to watch. But he just kept taking it, coming forward and launching haymakers. And in the corner he told me he wanted even more. Pew, who ultimately went nowhere in his career but still possessed far too much class for this foe, mercifully ended things with a right hand in the third round. To show you how sick my guy was, he seemed to thoroughly enjoy the experience. "When can I get another guy

like that?," he asked on the long drive home.

Dawe's half-brother, a welterweight named John Savage, was another guy I tried to do a few things with, but after I had been scheduled him for a fight, he went off and shot someone. Someone I knew.

Needless to say, that relationship never really got off the ground.

It was kind of a thrill just to be around the fight game then, and you're usually willing to put up with quite a bit of chaos and inconvenience in order to keep your foot in the door.

In the years that followed, I became involved with much better fighters, namely Robert Daniels, the former IBF cruiserweight champion who captured the IBC title under my 'direction'. Even so, I had less patience to deal with the minor annoyances associated with managing a fighter. I wasn't a big fan of handholding or babysitting; I preferred to tell guys the truth rather than blow sunshine up their ass, and bailing them out of jail or getting them out of other kinds of scrapes just wasn't my idea of enjoyment. And the more 'colorful' the characters were, the less I appreciated it. For instance, one promising female fighter I got involved with needed a place to live, and problems developed when she drank up the entire liquor cabinet at the apartment we put her into, since, well, it brought a rather negative response from the person who actually owned the apartment.

The more I dealt with fighters, the greater the tendency I had to be rather impersonal, taking an approach to things that could be characterized as 'strictly business'. From that perspective, I suppose I didn't have the ideal temperament to be a top-flight manager.

But I wasn't completely wrong.

I used to relay, to people I did business with, an old saying that had been handed down to me by folks much wiser than me: "Don't fall in love with your fighter." In other words, don't get so emotionally immersed in his life that it clouds your own judgment. That's easier said than done. One of my ex-partners, Mike Frost, used to buddy up with Daniels. He brought him virtually everywhere he went, introduced him to all his friends, lent him money, and became concerned with his private and family life. Meanwhile, I always kept some distance. I knew Daniels did not have a good history with managers, so I told Mike he could wind up having his heart broken in the end, and sure enough, it was. The reaction was somewhat predictable - after Daniels left him, all Mike wanted to do was make the guy's life difficult, because he was so hurt.

Many fighters will end up biting the hand that feeds them. That's just a fact of life in this game, and an occupational hazard for the manager. But some fighters will not do that. They understand loyalty when it is shown to them, and know how to reciprocate. Those guys prove to be worth the time, and then some. Maybe that's a special skill of an effective manager - enough knowledge of human nature to be able to scope out the right guy to deal with.

There's a line one has to straddle; one that is not so clearly defined. And that's why I say there's probably a distinction to be drawn between a successful manager and a GREAT

manager. The great manager is not only successful, but also knows how to strike that delicate balance between doing business the right way on behalf of the fighter - and in turn himself - and forging enough of a personal bond with his client to develop the kind of trust that keeps the relationship thriving.

That takes an awful lot of patience. It also takes a genuine love for not only the sport, but also the LIFE associated with the sport - something that can't be manufactured.

It also takes the ability to recognize an opportunity and strike when the iron is hot. Let me tell you what can happen when one doesn’t have that ability.

Back in 1994 I became involved in a promotional agreement with a fighter named Classius Ali, who was getting ready to embark on a pro career. As an amateur, competing under his given name, Wayne Blair, he had won several national tournaments; among the people he knocked out in the non-paid ranks was Lonnie Bradley, who went on to win the WBO 160-lb. title.

Classius may not have been the greatest prospect ever to come out of the amateurs, but he was a pretty good one, and had a legitimate chance to become a money-making contender someday, if things were handled right.

Handling things right was one thing we certainly intended to do. We had someone designated to carefully pick out his opponents. We had a casino interested in attaching him to all its fight cards.

And it seemed there was a management team that realized what had to be done to move this young man up each rung of the ladder. Ali's principal manager was his brother, a private investigator in the Miami area who appeared to have been working a lifetime on the press materials he handed me when we first got together. These guys had all the standard components - the nickname ("Electrifying” Classius Ali), the persona, and the biography, which may have been substantially embellished, for all I know. They even had a name for themselves - "Team Ali".

It’s one thing if you just want to bring someone along as a fighter. It’s quite another to embrace the idea of spawning a marketable ‘product’, capable of taking things to a much higher plane.

These gentlemen not only wanted to embrace it; they wanted to put it in a bear hug.

They had a great rap, speaking in abstract terms about how Classius Ali was going to storm his way to a world title and transcend the sport of boxing. They talked about merchandising, marketing, endorsements, I liked their level of enthusiasm, and that they conveyed an understanding that meeting the super-objective meant doing as much out of the ring as inside of it.

We got the young man a couple of wins to start off his career. Then we were hit out of left field with something that was totally unexpected.

Call it a godsend.

At a weigh-in for one of Ali's fights in Mississippi, Jacobs, who by this time was the Director of Boxing Programming for USA Network, informed me that the producers of MTV's "The Real World", one of the shows that began the new wave of reality television, were looking for a young professional athlete to insert into the cast for the upcoming season, which was to take place in London.

If Classius Ali was interested, he thought he could help us make it happen.

Well, my partner and I were doing cartwheels. Not only was this going to give the fighter regular exposure on national television, as well as a chance for people to get to know him in a way that would otherwise be impossible, it was also a golden opportunity to put him before an entirely new audience. You've seen more recently where HBO's "KO Nation" and Kushner's "Thunderbox" failed to come up with the right formula to reach the younger demographic. Well, placing Classius Ali on MTV would do just that, within the context of one of its existing programs, without having to force it down anyone's throat. We envisioned the kinds of scenarios that could unfold. The cameras could document him as he was preparing for fights. They would follow him to the arena. They would capture the thrill of victory, though hopefully not the agony of defeat. If Ali was popular enough, perhaps MTV might want to become involved with televising his fights, even after he left the show. The possibilities were endless. You have to understand - "The Real World" was a big hit for the network; several of the participants went to do much more substantial things.

I felt if we got creative enough, we could possibly, through this charismatic, good-looking kid, introduce boxing to a new generation; something the sport badly needed, and in fact still needs. And then we could truly talk about 'transcending' boxing.

I huddled with my partner and we began to strategize. Was there any way we could work hand-in-hand with the MTV people? How would we work out the logistics of the fighter training for each fight? Could we get him some fights in England? There'd be a trade-off, but would it be worth it for him to be a little less active during the year the show was being shot, for the sake of having all that exposure? Should we hire a special publicist? Ideas were flying around, fast and furious. Really, whether it was ultimately going to pan out or not, there had never been an opportunity quite like this.

To me, it was an obvious no-brainer. If somebody wants to place something like this in your lap, you're a fool not to take advantage of it.

We decided to schedule a special meeting with Team Ali and tell the guys about this fortuitous turn of events.

Their response, to say the least, was underwhelming.

They came up with every conceivable reason not to do the show. Classius' brother said their mother was not feeling very well and that the kid shouldn't be straying too far from home. The

show would upset his training regimen. It would interfere with his development. He would not have his ‘support structure’ with him. He felt strange about living with other people.

In the end, they basically said thanks, but no thanks.

Later we found out the real objection. Ali's trainer saw the show as a threat; he feared if he let the fighter slip out of his hands and go somewhere else that he would lose him entirely. So he recommended against it. Of course, if he'd had an open mind about it, we would have explained to him that we would have arranged for the fighter to prep with him to some extent, and that he would be in the corner, doing whatever he'd been doing all along. And besides, this was only a temporary thing anyway. But apparently that wasn't going to satisfy him. He was not interested in relinquishing even partial control, and must have surmised that if Classius Ali got out to see the rest of that big wide world, he wasn't going to want his trainer anymore.

The fighter went along with it. The brother went along with it. And that was that.

So much for transcending boxing. So much for their PR presentation. So much for marketing, merchandising, and endorsements. So much for packaging the sport to a new demographic. So much for the "A Star Is Born" scenario we envisioned.

And as far as I was concerned, so much for "Team Ali".

I was deflated, and let's just say my interest in the fighter dwindled after that. While it's true that this opportunity might never have come our way in the first place, the fact is that it did. And the incident proved to be unusually instructive.

My diagnosis was that they weren't as serious as I was.

They wanted to play the part, but when it came down to it, they were afraid of success, or in taking the steps that were necessary to attain it. And to my way of thinking, knowing they had fumbled this, they were invariably going to fumble something else down the line.

Once they missed their best chance, what could I possibly have done with them in moving ahead?

Not much. I became wary about investing the time, not to mention the money, in getting the 15-20 wins that were going to be required just to get the fighter to the middle of the pack. And I was firmly convinced they were going to put the brakes on anything that would potentially have propelled us into the rarified air.

It's not that I was ever mad at those guys. Far from it. But my partner was a little sore, and relations quickly became strained. Eventually they wanted to be released from the promotional contract. My partner was absolutely dead set against it; he sounded like he was intent on keeping Ali from fighting if he didn't fight for us. To me, this was silly. What did we really want to keep him for? He passed on the best marketing hook of his life. His management was not about to go the extra mile. That was not a formula to get us a return on our investment. I told him we

needed to let Ali go, rather than throw good money after bad. And aside from that, the contract was in my company's name, so I had the final call.

Classius Ali never did very much with his career. He lost the only meaningful fight he had - dropping a 12-round decision to Lionel Ortiz in January of 1998. The last time he fought was 1999. I heard occasionally about him hanging around gyms in Miami, but little more than that.

Things could have been different. Dramatically different.

All his people had to do was make the right decision at the right time.

But we'll never know about that, will we?

It just goes to show you - being a real fight manager is not conducive to a casual level of commitment. It's not for ‘posers’.

And it illustrates that fighters need to know what they're looking at when a prospective manager approaches them.

I intend to expand upon it in detail later in this book, but suffice it to say that if a fighter is serious about his career, he not only has to find a manager who cares about his well-being, but, even more than that, he needs to realize that he's more wisely served by a pro than by an amateur, better off with a doer than a talker, more judicious in following those who are expert than those who are naïve.

Having said that, let me tell you the story of a guy who possesses the qualities - patience, personality, ingenuity, sincerity, savvy, common sense, and compassion - that represent the best of what the managerial role has to offer.

In a sport that has more than its share of scalawags, connivers and con artists, Henry Foster is a breath of fresh air. In an industry where you have to constantly look out for land mines, Henry is one of the good guys - the antithesis of the prototypical hustler who gives you the inviting smile while aiming a knife squarely at your back.

A veteran of the heating oil business who has also owned and operated a trendy restaurant called "Mulberry Street" on Miami's South Beach, Foster originally got into boxing as a hobby. But as happens with a lot of part-timers, the bug bit him hard. He got into it more and more seriously, and a few years ago he collaborated on building a gym that eventually became known as Fight Club Miami.

Foster is no different from many managers in that he has experienced his share of heartbreak with fighters. I met him when he was handling Juan LaPorte, the former WBC featherweight champion. With Foster, LaPorte had received shots at IBF and WBO titles, and along the road, Henry and his wife Margaret had taken LaPorte into their home. Like all of his fighters, Henry had made this ex-champ a very personal project.

That's why it was a bit surprising when LaPorte, who I didn't really know, came up to me at a Larry Holmes card in Mississippi (he was working with an undercard fighter named Tomas Rodriguez) and asked me how he could go about putting together a fight at the casino, like everybody else was doing in those days. I asked, "Isn't Henry Foster your manager?." He just shrugged; the kind of shrug that tells you a guy's got other designs for himself. Later, I found out that LaPorte took a WBO title fight against Zach Padilla without Henry's knowledge, and Foster had one heck of a time collecting the managerial share that was due him.

Fortunately, he wasn't discouraged by that disappointing episode.

Henry's not necessarily a slick dealmaker with network connections like Shelly Finkel; he's not a hyphenate like an Emmanuel Steward, who handles training duties as well. He's not a Frank Maloney, who brings years and years of experience to the table, or a Bill Cayton, who, when he was alive, had millions to invest if need be.

But he's a grinder. He just keeps plugging away, spurred on by faith in his fighter, faith in the sport, and faith in his own judgment.

There are a lot of managers who couldn't get a fight for anybody unless he signed that fighter's rights away to a promoter. What I always admired about Henry is that he has been able to bring fighters along, to a significant extent, without having to tie up those rights with someone from the get-go. And believe me, it's not an easy thing to do. There is value to that kind of independence. You certainly have to concede in this day and age that in 99.5% of the cases, a fighter is going to have to align himself with a promoter sooner or later in order to get involved in the more meaningful fights. But the longer a fighter can successfully stay away from that, the better off he is.

The vast majority of managers don't even want to make that effort: they move toward the path of least resistance. And if you're in an area with any boxing to speak of, any fighter who shows some ability is likely to be approached about signing a promotional deal. Because promoters don't normally use fighters without ties of some kind, it takes genuine skill and resourcefulness to get a fighter to the ten-round level as a virtual independent. I give Henry all the credit in the world for having been able to do that. And he has made a habit of taking a shot with guys no one else has a particular interest in.

I was briefly involved, in a small way, with one of Foster's fighters - a heavyweight from Miami named Jorge Valdes. Without any real amateur background, Valdes was unpolished, clumsy, and certainly not in demand as he turned pro. But moving slowly, Henry nurtured Valdes' career, maneuvering him into a position where he was 15-1-1 and ready to go to the next level. At that point, Valdes was a promotional free agent, because through perseverance, Foster had built him virtually all by himself. Henry eventually came together with Kushner on a deal and Valdes crept into the Top 20 before losing to the likes of Larry Donald, Axel Schulz and Shannon Briggs. Even so, Henry has able to get him a WBU title shot against Corrie Sanders, which turned out to be the last of Valdes' career, actually long after the fighter had lost interest.

Henry turned around and did something similar with another heavyweight named Sherman

Williams. A complete unknown who came to Miami from the Bahamas, Williams had an uninspiring 1-2 record when Foster took him over. Few managers and even fewer promoters would have had any interest whatsoever in a fighter like that. But Foster carefully guided Williams to twelve straight wins, showcasing his punching power and instilling much-needed confidence in his charge. Williams attained ten-round status, beating Alfred Cole and fighting a draw with Jameel McCline. And if he hadn't been robbed against Obed Sullivan, he would have won the NABF title; one can only speculate as to what could have happened from there.

To the casual fan, these might not sound like rousing successes, but one has to put it into perspective - it was really quite an accomplishment for these guys to get as far as they did, and represents notable work on the part of the manager. They were fighters nobody else wanted, and it took a lot of ‘sweat equity’ to make them viable. The world is often wide open for the guys who have won a slew of amateur titles, but for the ham-and-eggers, negotiating the rough waters up the ranks in boxing is a much greater challenge.

But I'll be damned if Henry didn't do it again, and this time he hit a home run.

Some people who follow boxing closely have become conversant with Glen Johnson's story. But the great under-reported part of that story is the role Henry Foster has played in it.

And it's a participation that absolutely cannot be discounted.

When Henry first told me he had signed Glen Johnson to a management deal, I remember asking myself why in the world he would do that. This is nothing if not a business of front-runners. The culture of the industry is that the only thing worth going after is what is "hot", what is unblemished, what has a name. Glen Johnson was a capable fighter, but he did not fit any of those categories.

Plus, the guy needed money. Badly.

Johnson had a hard time paying his bills. His electric would go off from time to time. There were some personal complications as well; for one thing, there was a daughter out there that he couldn't find. He had no fan base; local wins were going to be hard to come by, since Miami was just not the kind of market where fighters had hometown followings. Having lost seven of his last twelve fights after beginning his career 32-0, he was, to the boxing world, long past his sell-by date.

Given these parameters, experienced observers would see red flags all over the place. If this was a project at all, it was one for a hobbyist, not someone who truly understood the dynamics of the industry.

There wouldn't seem to be a manager in this business who would even consider investing time, effort and money in a fighter like that, much less one who has never held a world title.

That's why it's so extraordinary that Henry Foster stepped up to the plate.

At first glance, the two did not seem to be an ideal match. Johnson had a well-earned reputation for going into his opponent's backyard, time after time, and coming away on the short end of bad decisions. What might be most appropriate was a handler with some ‘juice’ to help reverse that trend. But Henry has never been one to roll over and ‘play the game’; he's not a tool for promoters, even when he's got a fighter signed with one of them. In the past, he and I have had long conversations about his struggles over purses, opponents, and contractual obligations. Everything was a negotiation, and getting promoters to follow through is often quite arduous. But Foster is no one's rubber stamp. People in the boxing establishment generally aren't interested in going out of their way to do favors for people like that.

Indeed, Johnson's first fight with Henry looked for a while like a microcosm of everything that had come before. He went to Germany and pulled off a huge upset in knocking out Thomas Ulrich, the WBO's #1 light heavyweight contender. But even then, they were trying to take it away from him. Ulrich had a ‘manager’ of sorts - his promoter, Klaus-Peter Kohl - and so after Johnson and Foster returned to the U.S., they found out that Johnson had failed a "drug test" it turns out he never even took. Ultimately, the effort at thievery did not succeed.

Did things get easier? Hardly.

There was a decision loss to Derrick Harmon, who actually beat him going away.

There was a very questionable majority decision defeat to Julio Cesar Gonzalez (in Gonzalez' hometown, naturally), followed by a draw with Daniel Judah, after which Judah reportedly admitted he probably lost.

This was leading up to a moment of truth for Johnson, and his manager. The fighter needed to know that someone wasn’t going to abandon him once again after yet another setback; that he still had a backer and a booster; that he wasn’t the only one who could see some light at the end of the tunnel.

At the critical time, Henry Foster stuck to his guns and stood by his fighter.

Then he found a southpaw who was world-rated, and vulnerable. And Glen Johnson went back to work.

In a fight that (no surprise) was supposed to be a vehicle for his opponent, Johnson scored a clear win over Eric Harding and got back into the world championship picture.

After boxing to a draw with Clinton Woods for a vacant IBF title, Johnson came back to win a decision in the mandated rematch and capture something that had eluded him in two previous attempts - a world championship.

If the story ended there, it would have been happy enough. But Johnson, as we know by now, kept going. Another underdog win - this one over Roy Jones Jr. - prolonged his improbable comeback tale.

Now he has taken the ball and crossed the goal line. Refreshingly, Johnson at last wound up on the positive side of a disputed decision, getting a split nod over Antonio Tarver and in the process becoming what amounts to the "people's champion" in the light heavyweight division.

As for the coup de grace, Henry's even gotten him an endorsement deal, for an energy drink. That puts him one endorsement ahead of his former amateur teammate, Classius Ali, and for that matter, nearly everyone else in boxing.

Things are good. Things have come full circle.

And things aren't finished just yet.

This is a great story, to be sure, but to leave it at that would be to miss some of the point. We can learn a few lessons here as well - about faith; about the value of determination; about character; about looking below the surface and finding what's real, what's solid; about the fact that it's never too late to blossom; about what is possible if we believe in ourselves and have others who believe in us; about staying loyal to someone who IS worth the time and effort.

Undoubtedly, these are lessons from which we can all benefit.

Accordingly, the people who teach us lessons like this need to be acknowledged.

I was originally going to write this chapter before the Tarver-Johnson bout, in the way of a pre-fight piece, but the more I thought about it, the less the result really mattered. I was going to write it either way. In a time when the proliferation of sanctioning bodies churns out 'champions' who, depending on their connections, may not ever have to face a serious challenge en route to a title, saluting people who have taken the hard road to the top is not just a good idea; I felt it was mandatory.

In a sport where we can find as many 'downers' as we want if we look hard enough, we can sure use some stories of genuine uplift that need not be contrived.

With his wins over Woods, Jones and Tarver, Glen Johnson has positioned himself as a front-runner for Fighter of the Year honors.

And there's no question in my mind about the Manager of the Year.

As someone who has spent some time in the boxing business, I feel the obligation to enlighten my colleagues a bit. No one should become deluded about this – it's not the slickest trick in the book to sign an Olympian or to take someone on who is at or close to the mountaintop. There are dozens and dozens of managers who can do that. I could find them all day long. Granted, there is a certain talent that is needed to carry things out - some of them do it well; some do it badly. But in the final analysis, all of them are, by design, playing the percentages.

The real achievement lies in bucking the odds, finding value where no one else did, and scoring big. That's the kind of thing that places someone head and shoulders above the pack.

And then there are those intangible elements that can’t possibly be ignored.

I remember meeting Angelo Dundee many years ago, and asking him who he was going to be pulling for in some mega-fight that was upcoming. He gave me his answer, and his rationale – a statement that was so beautiful in its simplicity: "I root for nice people."

I will be the first one to admit that Henry is my friend, and that factors into why I'd be pushing him for that award. But you know, there was a period of time when I stood up to some of the more corrupt powers-that-be in boxing, and was blackballed by some of them because of it. But when I was abandoned by most of the people in this industry I thought were my friends, Henry never abandoned me. It's just not part of his makeup.

That kind of credibility counts for quite a bit on my scorecard.

So yes, I'm feeling happy that Henry Foster finally had some good fortune with a fighter.

But I entertain the proposition that maybe - just maybe - Glen Johnson is the one who really got lucky.