Valentine Golding was never going to be world middleweight champion. He was a good amateur and professional boxer, however, making a mark in the London ABA championships and, as a pro, always capable of springing an upset against virtually anyone courtesy of his concussive right hand.

The Golding right cross was the stuff of legend for a time in London amateur circles after it claimed a long-forgotten victim in sensational style at the York Hall, Bethnal Green, the Mecca of East End boxing. Such was the effect of the punch that people routinely said it was the only real-life re-run of the scene in Raging Bull when Jake LaMotta parks the nose of the handsome Tony Janiro on the other side of his face and a spectator comments: “He ain’t pretty no more.”

I say all this because just last week I heard that Val – he was never addressed as Valentine – had died some three years ago in very unfortunate circumstances. He was only in his 30s. I knew him well for several years. He was in the same stable as a boxer I represented, Colin ‘Sweet C’ McMillan, who won a version of the world featherweight title. They were both trained by a friend of mine named Howard Rainey, an ex-heavyweight who doubled as a rather impressive autodidact philosopher in the classical fight-game mould.

Howard supervised his fighters’ roadwork on the running track at Battersea Park, South London. Being only a mile from Chelsea, over the river, the track sometimes attracted celebrities as well as Howard’s motley crew. There were a couple of actors and also Morrissey, the singer from The Smiths, who based an entire album called ‘Boxers’ on his observations of Howard and his men in the park. Blithely unaware of Morrissey’s million-strong fan base, all Howard would say was: “Nice fella, that Morrissey.”

Val was the closest to Colin in the group that trudged round the track in the mornings, always led by Colin, a fine runner. Sometimes I would give my smoke-filled lungs a spin along with them. Then I would join Howard – a heavy smoker if one sporting a whistle – in the grassy centre for a cigarette. Colin would come up and say: “I can’t believe you two.”

In a never-to-be repeated performance I once beat Val in a 100-metre dash. Colin reprimanded Val: “We’re supposed to be professional athletes, Val. Tsch, for Jon to beat you…”

That is to give a wrong impression of Val’s fitness and attitude. He was a fighter, not a runner. No one tried harder. He lived for boxing, and indeed for Colin. Once, sitting on the grass after running, he said to me: “I’ll never be a champion, Jon.”

“Of course you will, Val,” I lied. A justifiable lie, though, I feel.

“No I won’t,” Val said. “Colin’s special. I’m not.”

We stuck together as a team throughout Colin’s career. As well as running together, we

showered together, went to the gym together and ate together at Caesar's American restaurant on Waterloo Road after the weigh-ins on the days of the fights. On the night Colin won the world title Val was caught cold and knocked out in one round by a so-so boxer named Kevin Sheeran. There had been talk of a bout with Steve Collins beforehand. It was a bad blow for Val's career but despite it he could not have been more pleased about Colin's victory. His favourite film was 'Homeboy' starring Mickey Rourke as a fighter. I can't tell you how many times Val told me the plot of that film or re-enacted parts of it. I remember one day at a gym in Wapping that we briefly used, and that was all he did, all afternoon.

For all these intimacies Val remained something of a man of mystery. He was always impeccably dressed and was known for living very cleanly. I didn't know if he was married or had a job or where he got his money from, and he didn't volunteer the information. All I knew was he lived in Croydon. I don't think Colin or Howard knew much, if any, more. Val was a private man. He was just there when he was with us and then he was gone. I never asked. Why should he have answered? There are a lot of people like that in boxing.

The last time I spoke to him was on the phone about six years ago. I was inviting him to the launch of a book in which he featured. He said he would come but didn't turn up. He sounded the same Val. After that Colin lost contact with him. Val stopped boxing and disappeared, apparently. But he still phoned Howard intermittently, and it was from Howard that I found out. I had lost contact with Howard for a few years. He and Colin went to Val's funeral but didn't know where to find me. Like Val I had disappeared. I suppose that is the cruellest test of life, to find yourself disappearing and then come back. There is so much luck involved, and Val didn't have it.

Howard and Colin told me what happened. Val met someone and they had a kid, a boy. Then the boy was run over and killed. Val went to pieces. He died alone, from an overdose. I don't know of what. Some say it was heroin, others that it was something to do with steroids. I don't want to know, or rake over it. The last time Val talked to Howard he was in despair. Howard invited him to come and stay and Val said he would, but he didn't turn up again.

I was walking down Waterloo Road the other day and saw that Caesars had gone. So has Val. I was going to go on the wagon after Christmas but am making one exception. Cheers, Val. I am so very sorry. And this one's for you.