Written by Michael Woods
Tuesday, 13 November 2012 22:02

It hurts. That Steward will never again wrap his hands, calmly tell him that he has a special talent, even on a day he doesn't feel it so, it hurts Andy Lee. Boxing lost a champion trainer, manager, promoter, analyst, and most of all, human being on Oct. 25.

I'd say the relationship between Emanuel Steward and Andy Lee pretty well boiled down what made Manny so special. The boxer from Limerick came across Steward back in 2004, when Manny was on a speaking tour in England, and made his way to Belfast, where he met with young Lee, who was standout amateur.

Lee made it to the Olympics in 2004 for Ireland and took up Steward's offer to come to Detroit, and spar at the Kronk. "I couldn't believe he knew my name," the fighter told me on Tuesday night, a few hours after speaking at the standing-room-only memorial service held for Steward in Detroit.

Lee didn't just hook up with Steward, wasn't just blessed to learn from the best trainer of this era, he actually moved in with Manny. Since January 2006, the kid from Limerick and Manny were housemates.

Manny cooked for Lee, hung out with him as a pal, listened and dispensed wisdom in a fatherly fashion, and believed in the pugilist. "Yeah, I couldn't believe he knew my name, let alone train me," said the 28-2 southpaw. "It was a dream come true. I'd read about him. Emanuel allowed

me to live my dream."

At the service, attended by the best and brightest boxers of this age, including Thomas Hearns, Steward's best known client; Lennox Lewis; Wladimir Klitschko; Evander Holyfield; Sugar Ray Leonard; Roy Jones Jr.; Bob Arum; Ferdie Pacheco; Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, which featured a performance by Steward pal Aretha Franklin, Lee spoke.

He told the thousands packed into the Greater Grace Temple that Steward, who died of cancer on Oct. 25, believed that he'd win a title, and more importantly, that he was a special human being who opened his home and his heart to the Irishman.

"I probably knew him in the last years as well as anyone," Lee told me. The service, which went almost five hours, the fighter said, was what Manny deserved. "He made everyone feel good, made everyone comfortable, important people, or a rough kid," he said. "He took the time to get to know people, know your background. That's what made him a great trainer." That's an accurate description--Steward, age 68, trained 41 champions, and touched just about everyone he had more than minimal contact with. His specialty was lifting you up, and the world has not enough of those types.

The harsh truth, that that smile, that demeanor, that vibe, that wisdom isn't here anymore, still hasn't truly sunk in for Lee. It hit him at the service, sort of, but part of him won't allow the reality to seep in. "It doesn't feel like he's gone," Lee said.

I asked Lee, will it be hard to fight? Can he lace up the lace up the gloves and campaign with the same focus, without Manny in his corner, the guy who believed him in in 2004, and when he lost to Brian Vera in 2008, and when he came up a bit short in a title shot against Julio Cesar Chavez this past June?

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," Lee said. "The best thing I can do is go on and achieve. He always believed in me, so the best thing I can do is go out and win. The best way I can honor Emanuel is be a champion one day. I didn't do it while he was there, so....."

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Nice, nice copy. And through my tears and trembling, that is the most that I can post right now. Holla!

dino da vinci says:

And like we need more, here's yet another extremely sad fact pertaining to the loss of the legendary trainer Emanuel Steward. Even knowledgable fight fans have no idea of just how deeply knowledgable Emanuel was. It's true. I can hear their collective voices in my head. Oh yeah, Emanuel Steward was sharp! Thing is, you have no idea.

An absolutely huge loss to a sport that can I'll afford it.

O Great One, RIP.

ICE PICK SLIM says:

R.I.P. to one of the greatest boxing trainers the sport has ever seen. He'll truly be missed.

Long live the legacy of Emanuel Steward.