

Johnny Bos: A Remembrance 1952 - 2013

Written by Thomas Hauser
Sunday, 12 May 2013 19:33



Johnny Bos, who died this weekend at his home in Florida, was a Runyonesque character.

Bos was a boxing guy. Other boxing insiders describe him as one of the most knowledgeable boxing people they ever met.

“He was my first mentor,” matchmaker Ron Katz told *The Sweet Science* on Sunday. “I was a kid doing shows in White Plains when he took me under his wing. Night after night, we were on the phone until the wee small hours of the morning, talking boxing.”

“Johnny was one of my teachers,” Lou DiBella said on hearing of Bos’s death. “There are matchmakers all over the world who were influenced by him. He loved boxing. He loved

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fighters. He was a brilliant hardcore blue-collar boxing guy. And he was incredibly generous with his knowledge.”

For years, Bos (seen in above photo, from 2009 Florida Boxing Hall of Fame induction) was an integral part of the New York fight scene. “The go-to guy for a lot of people,” Hall-of-Fame matchmaker Bruce Trampler called him.

Then Johnny moved to Florida, but things didn’t work out in the “Sunshine State” so he returned to The Big Apple.

“The Wizard of Boz” (written in 1999) is republished below. I wrote it in a time of hope. Unfortunately, things turned sour for John in the new millennium. Nine years later, economics and health issues forced him back to Florida.

Johnny Bos might not be missed by a lot of people. But the people who miss him will miss him a lot.

* * *

The Wizard Of Bos

Go to a club fight. Look around the arena. You might see a large man with shaggy dirty-blond hair, six-feet-three-inches tall, 255 pounds (down from a previous high of 300), who bears a faint resemblance to Hulk Hogan. Engage him in conversation. If the man knows more about boxing than anyone you’ve ever encountered, there’s a chance it’s Johnny Bos.

Johnny Bos fits between the cracks of what everybody else does in boxing. He’s part matchmaker, part manager, part booking agent, and so on. “I manage the managers,” is how he describes what he does. Bos even had one amateur fight, which he won on a decision in 1971. But he doesn’t remember it very well because he was drunk at the time.

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So what do boxing people think of Johnny Bos?

Boxing writer Michael Katz sums up for his brethren, when he says, “Johnny Bos is one of the best minds in boxing. There are very few guys around who know and love the game as much as he does. And he cares about the fighters. The only complaint I have is that he should be in a position of influence and authority instead of doing what he does today. I wouldn’t mind it if Johnny Bos ran the sport.”

“The Wizard of Bos” was born in Brooklyn on Valentine’s Day in 1952. His father was a shipyard worker, who later worked as a doorman in the building where Barney Ross lived.

“My father was a big fight fan,” Bos says. “As far back as I can remember, I’d be sitting on his lap, watching the Friday Night Fights on television. That’s where my interest in boxing came from.”

Bos was kicked out of Fort Hamilton High School when he was in tenth grade. “I was bored all the time, so I never paid attention in class,” he acknowledges. “Nowadays, they’d probably call it ‘attention deficit disorder.’ And I was a frequent truant and an alcoholic.”

After leaving school, Bos worked as a stockboy at Ohrbach’s department store. Then, at age eighteen, he began an eight-year stint as a mail handler on the graveyard shift for the United States Postal Service.

“Meanwhile, I was hanging around boxing,” he remembers. “I’d go to the gyms, Jack Dempsey’s restaurant, any place there were fighters. And I was writing for Flash. That started when I was fifteen. Bruce Trampler, Don Majeski, and I used to stand outside Madison Square Garden on fight nights and sell copies of Flash.”

In 1978, Bos left the post office to concentrate on boxing. “Managers and promoters had been calling me for years, asking questions about this fighter and that opponent, and I’d tell them

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everything I knew for free. Finally, I said to myself, 'Don't be a jerk. Everybody else in boxing gets paid for what they do. So should I.'

Bos's first paying gig was as matchmaker for a January 1978 Tiffany Promotions card on Long Island.

"Ronnie Harris was scheduled to fight Angel Ortiz in the main event," he recalls. "The day of the show, there was a terrible snowstorm. Ronnie had trouble getting to the arena, and didn't arrive until fifteen minutes before his fight." One of the other matches Bos made that night was Austin Johnson against a novice heavyweight named Gerry Cooney.

"And then, it was like, all of a sudden, I was hot," Bos reminisces. "Mike Jones and Dennis Rappaport began paying me to choose opponents for Cooney, Harris, and all their other fighters. Mickey Duff hired me for John Mugabe, Cornelius Boza-Edwards, Lloyd Honeygan, and Frank Bruno. I was the matchmaker for Main Events in the 1980's, when they had their greatest years. Evander Holyfield, Mark Breland, Pernell Whitaker, Meldrick Taylor, Tyrell Biggs, Rocky Lockridge; I was there for all those guys. Bill Cayton and Jim Jacobs hired me for Mike Tyson. I was doing everything for everyone; making matches, choosing opponents, recommending sparring partners. I even stopped drinking. I remember the date; November 17, 1986. My life was good; but I was an alcoholic. The way I was drinking, it wouldn't have been long before I was dead. And I decided I'd rather live than die."

"The best time of my life came in 1992," Bos continues. "In the course of six weeks, I had four guys fight for world championships, and three of them won. Joey Gamache knocked out Chil-Sung Chun to win the WBA lightweight title. Tracy Harris Patterson knocked out Thierry Jacob in a WBC superbantamweight bout. And Tyrone Booze, who was a 30-to-1 underdog, stopped Derek Angol to win the WBO cruiserweight championship."

That was the peak.

"But then," Bos remembers, "everything fell apart. I wish I was as good a businessman as I am a matchmaker, but I'm not. I was never a 'let's have a written contract' kind of guy. I always did business on a handshake. So the first thing that happened was, after Tracy won the title, I got screwed by Floyd Patterson. All he said to me was, now that Tracy was champion, he didn't

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need me anymore. That was seven years of hard work down the drain. Then Michael Bentt, Darrin Allen, and some of the other promising fighters I was working with walked. My father died. And two months after that, my little brother died of AIDS. You take blows like that, and you lose your confidence. And to make matters worse, I'd moved to Florida, which was a mistake because it took me out of the mainstream. And in boxing, like every other other business, guys are more likely to screw you if they don't see you face-to-face."

By 1995, Bos was, to use his own words, "reduced to being a fringe guy in boxing. I was still a fan; I'll always be a fan. But I wasn't much of a factor in the business anymore. Then I decided to give it one more shot. I came back to New York; started doing my thing again; and you know the rest. Johnny Bos is now back."

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thausen@rcn.com. His most recent book (Thomas Hauser on Sports: Remembering the Journey) will be published by the University of Arkansas Press later this month.

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dino da vinci says:

Darn. I was having a great day right up to now. Trust me, most people pretend they're in boxing, that they know boxing. My believe is such that I don't believe there are any real experts in boxing. That said, if there was and is, Johnny was as close to short list as it got. No one ever gave the sport more and received less. Teddy (Brenner) can finally get some rest as Johnny can take over some of the workload up in heaven.

Johnny was my eBay nemesis in my quest to corner the market on Police Gazette magazines when the site first came out.

There are so many people I keep telling myself I'm going to call but then I run out of week. Darn, Those of you that didn't know Johnny, well, boxing just lost a giant.
RIP Great Man, RIP.

Radam G says:

WOW! I'm shock! I'm wordness. And can only say my deepest, deepest condolences. Holla!

the Roast says:

Well said Dino. R.I.P. Johnny Bos.

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Carmine Cas says:

RIP Johnny Boss

ali says:

Rest in peace big Johnny

deepwater says:

RIP Bos. what a character. a great guy to sit next to at the fights. I hung with him and mitch rose, mitch rose was wearing a kkk sheet at the time. very funny story. mitch knocked out butterbean and couldn't get a fight so to drum up attention for himself he dressed like a kkk guy at the fights. you can imagine how the night went. sorry Bos had to flee nyc for Florida. RIP Bos-Man