

Ivan Robinson, Tyrell Biggs Enter PA. Boxing Hall of Fame

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Monday, 20 May 2013 14:06



A two-time conqueror of Arturo Gatti, an Olympic gold medalist, a deceased legend and a world-renowned referee headed the 10-member Class of 2013 that was inducted into the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame Sunday afternoon in Philadelphia.

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That brings to 281 the number of inductees that have been enshrined by the Veteran Boxing Association Ring One began staging its Hall of Fame induction dinners in 1968. Sunday's festivities were the 45th such affair.

Joining Ivan "Mighty" Robinson (pictured), Tyrell Biggs, the late, great Charley Burley and Steve Smoger were trainers Fred Jenkins Sr., John Mulvenna and Norman Torpey Sr., welterweight Mario Saurennann, heavyweight Roy "Tiger" Williams and ring historian Chuck Hasson. Torpey also was inducted posthumously.

Robinson, one of Philly's most renowned amateurs, was favored to win a berth on the 1992 U.S. Olympic squad that competed in Barcelona, Spain, but he failed to live the dream he had harbored since he took up the sport, at age 5, in 1976 when he lost on a controversial, computed-scored decision at the Olympic Trials. He went on to post a 32-12-2 record, with 12 victories inside the distance, losing his sole shot at a professional world championship when he was outpointed by IBF lightweight titlist Philip Holiday in 1996. But Robinson, 42, probably is best known for winning two epic battles with Arturo Gatti, the first of which, a 10-round split decision on Aug. 22, 1998, was voted Fight of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America and The Ring.

Many fight fans have elevated Gatti's three classic fights with Micky Ward to a status surpassing even Robinson-Gatti, but those who were there in Boardwalk Hall for Robinson's signature moments will never forget how he met the ultimate warrior's fiery resolve with flames of his own.

"I'm pleased that so many people recognize what I did in my fights with Gatti," said Robinson, who was inducted into the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame in November 2012. "I will always love Gatti. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be as known as I am today. And I don't (begrudge) Micky Ward for the acclaim he gets for his fights with Gatti (two of which were won by Gatti). They were great fights and he deserves all the praise for what he did.

"My only regret is that me and Micky Ward never fought. I wanted to fight him, he didn't want to fight me. I guess it was about money; it usually is when a fight doesn't get made. But don't get me wrong, I love Micky Ward, too. I'm just glad to be in the mix of fighters who are always mentioned for being in great fights like the ones we had with Gatti."

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Biggs, like Robinson, got only one shot at a world title, losing by seventh-round technical knockout to undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson on Oct. 16, 1987, in Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall. But Biggs – who posted a pro record of 30-10 with 20 KOs -- will forever be known as one of nine American gold medalists in boxing at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, and as the first-ever gold medal winner in the super heavyweight division, which made its debut that year.

A former high school basketball star, the 6-5 Biggs, who overcame drug problems, works with young boxers at the Mitch Allen Recreation Center in North Philadelphia and is still recalled for his Olympic glory and courageous but perhaps doomed showdown with Tyson, who was then at the very top of his game.

"It's a good thing to have kids want to, you know, follow in your footsteps," he said. "When I started boxing, I never thought I'd be inducted into a Hall of Fame of any sort. This is a great honor for me."

Burley, who was 75 when he died on Oct. 16, 1992, in his hometown of Pittsburgh, was not represented Sunday by any family members. But the man widely hailed as the best fighter never to have fought for a world title – and one of the best ever by many ring historians – was hardly forgotten. Not only was Burley's smiling face on the cover of the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame program, but "Black Dynamite," who posted an 83-12-2 record (50 KOs), already had been inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, World Boxing Hall of Fame and The Ring Hall of Fame.

Smoger, the third man in the ring for the Lamont Peterson-Lucas Matthysse fight the previous night in Boardwalk Hall, worked his first pro bout in 1984 and he quickly rose through the ranks with assignments in more U.S. states and more countries than any referee in boxing history. Among the notable fights worked by "Double S" are Bernard Hopkins-Roy Jones I, Hopkins-Felix Trinidad, Larry Holmes-Ray Mercer, James Toney-Vassiliy Jirov and Andre Ward-Carl Froch.

Jenkins, who since 1976 has overseen the boxing program at the ABC Recreation Center in North Philadelphia, learned many tricks of the training trade from such illustrious predecessors as Milt Bailey, Wesley Mouzon and Quenzell McCall, and put what he picked up into use in helping develop, among others, David Reid, "Rockin'" Rodney Moore, Charlie "Choo Choo" Brown, Marvin "Machine Gun" Garris, Zahir Raheem, Anthony Thompson and current

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heavyweight contender Bryant Jennings.

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