During my visits to boxing gyms in the United States, I was asked many times about Luigi Minchillo. Fighters, trainers and managers still remember him as a true warrior. In fact, that was his nickname: *The Ring Warrior*. He got it thanks to his exciting style, which was (and still is) unusual for European fighters. Between 1977 and 1988, Minchillo compiled a professional record of 55 wins (31 by KO) and 5 losses. He became Italian and European light middleweight champion and fought for the WBA and WBC world titles. What makes him special is that American promoters hired him to go 10 rounds against Roberto Duran (in Las Vegas) and to challenge Thomas Hearns for the WBC belt (in Detroit). Those promoters knew that Minchillo threw hundreds of punches and received as many without slowing down the pace. It didn't matter how many times Luigi got hit; he just answered back with punch after punch and the crowd went wild. That's also the reason why *The Hitman* had one of the most dramatic moments of his career against Minchillo. Let's get the story from the Italian legend.

Luigi, tell us what happened during the 10th round of the Hearns fight.

We had a very long exchange, throwing a big number of punches and landing most of them. At one point, Hearns turned toward his corner because he couldn't take it anymore. I raised my arms in victory and started running around the ring. My cornermen entered the ring to celebrate. The referee pushed Hearns back to the center of the ring telling him to keep on fighting and he did. Six seconds later, the bell rang. The following round, I was discouraged. I thought that I would never win, no matter what I did. That was my mistake; I should have forgotten the incident, assaulted Hearns and got a KO. Looking at the video of the fight, I realized he didn't recover. A few punches would have been enough to stop him. My cornermen also made a mistake. They should have taken my gloves off. Then, how could the referee make the fight continue? But you know, in those few moments it was difficult to make the right decision.

Was Hearns your toughest opponent?

No way. Marijan Benes was much more difficult to fight. I knew it from the beginning because I saw him fight Damiano Lassandro to a draw in Pesaro (the city where I always lived). Benes was a Croatian southpaw and had been European light middleweight champion. I respected him and trained very hard, but he still was very tough to face. I won by majority decision in San Severo (Italy). It was October 28, 1982. Benes closed his career with a record of 31 wins, 6 losses and 1 draw.

What about Mike McCallum?

We fought in Milan, on December 1, 1984. He was WBA light middleweight champion. He beat me by 13th round TKO. I have no excuses. I just had a bad night. He was undefeated (22-0), but I didn't think he was as good as many of my previous opponents. As his career progressed, I changed my mind. Mike McCallum won the WBA middleweight and the WBC light heavyweight

titles; that puts him on the same level as Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran. Besides, McCallum had an excellent style and I cannot say that about many champions, not even Duran.

What do you mean?

Duran was a dirty fighter. He put his thumb in my eyes continuously. After the sixth round, I felt so much pain that I could have said *No mas.* But that wasn't my style and I kept fighting until the tenth round. Roberto Duran always put his finger in his opponent's eyes. Just ask Thomas Hearns and Marvin Hagler. I don't understand why the referee let him get away with that. I can understand why he did it: as a light middleweight he wasn't
Hands of Stone
anymore, his punches didn't hurt. Also, he had a belly and lost a lot of speed. Roberto Duran was at his best as lightweight.

The judges gave him almost every round.

In my opinion, the fight was even until the sixth round. Anyway, losing by one point or by ten points is the same thing. When I lost, I accepted it. You know, I never talked too much, never complained, and always told what I thought. Even today, at 50 years old, I'm not an expert in diplomacy. I tell it like it is. Some people advise me not do it and I tell them: *That's the way I am.*

Today's fighters talk a lot. They even insult each other in the press conference. You never did it. Why?

I preferred to let my fists do the talking in the ring. I don't approve of what today's fighters do, even in the ring. I find most of the big fights boring. When I see two guys jumping around the ring and throwing ten punches each, I switch to another TV channel. In my opinion, that's what hurts the popularity of boxing: the fans want to see two warriors giving 100% in each round. That's also why I sold out Milan's venues so many times. The people were sure I would give then their money's worth. Today, even the best promoter with the best press office doesn't make a sold out show. You know why? Because nobody wants to spend hard-earned money to see two dancers. Some boxers just don't get it: boxing fans want to see a fight!

You were managed by Giovanni Branchini, son of the legendary Umberto. Many American boxing people consider Umberto the best Italian manager of all times. Do you agree?

Yes, I do. Umberto was the quintessential boxing manager. He was far more intelligent than anybody else. In fact, they called him *The Cardinal.* Giovanni is also very bright. I wasn't surprised when he signed the most famous soccer player in the world: Ronaldo. Even in soccer, Giovanni turned out to be a successful manager.

You fought a guy who became the top manager in France: Louis Acaries. What kind of boxer he was?

I cannot make a judgement because he chose not to fight. He remained with his guard closed for the first 2 minutes and 30 seconds of every round. Only in the last 30 seconds, he threw some punches. How could he hope to get a decision? Anyway, I beat him easily for the European light middleweight belt. I must admit, that he was very fast and a few of his punches hurt me.

You were also Italian champion. Today's fighters consider it a minor belt. Do you agree?

No way. I must recognize that, in my era, winning the national title was more meaningful because there were a lot of good fighters. When I became Italian champion, I knew I was the best in my own country. Today, you can get a title match after a very short time. Besides, the purses are not so big. In fact, most boxers have a job from Monday to Friday.

Didn't you have to work when you fought professionally?

Yes I did, but only because I wanted to have another option if I got hurt. Even when I competed among amateurs, I had a job. From 1973 to 1976, I was a police officer. I participated to a couple of police boxing tournaments before becoming European welterweight and light middleweight champion. Since 1976, I've been working for the Province of Pesaro (a local government which regroups a big city and the surrounding towns, much like a U.S. county).

What about your regular amateur activity?

I won the Italian welterweight title and participated to the 1976 Olympics. Right after that, I got an offer to train in America. But I was married. We had two children and choose to stay in Italy.

You traveled a lot, anyway. They hired you in France, England, Monte Carlo, and in almost every Italian fight town.

Yes, but even in Italy they put me against foreign fighters. After winning the Italian light middleweight championship and defending it many times, I had no more challengers. So, I faced and defeated the best from abroad.

Luigi Minchillo

Birthplace: San Paolo Civitate, Italy.

Born: March 17, 1955

Division: Light Middleweight

Stance: Orthodox

Manager: Giovanni Branchini

Record: 55 Wins (31 KOs) and 5 Losses

Titles: Italian and European Champion