Written by Frank Lotierzo
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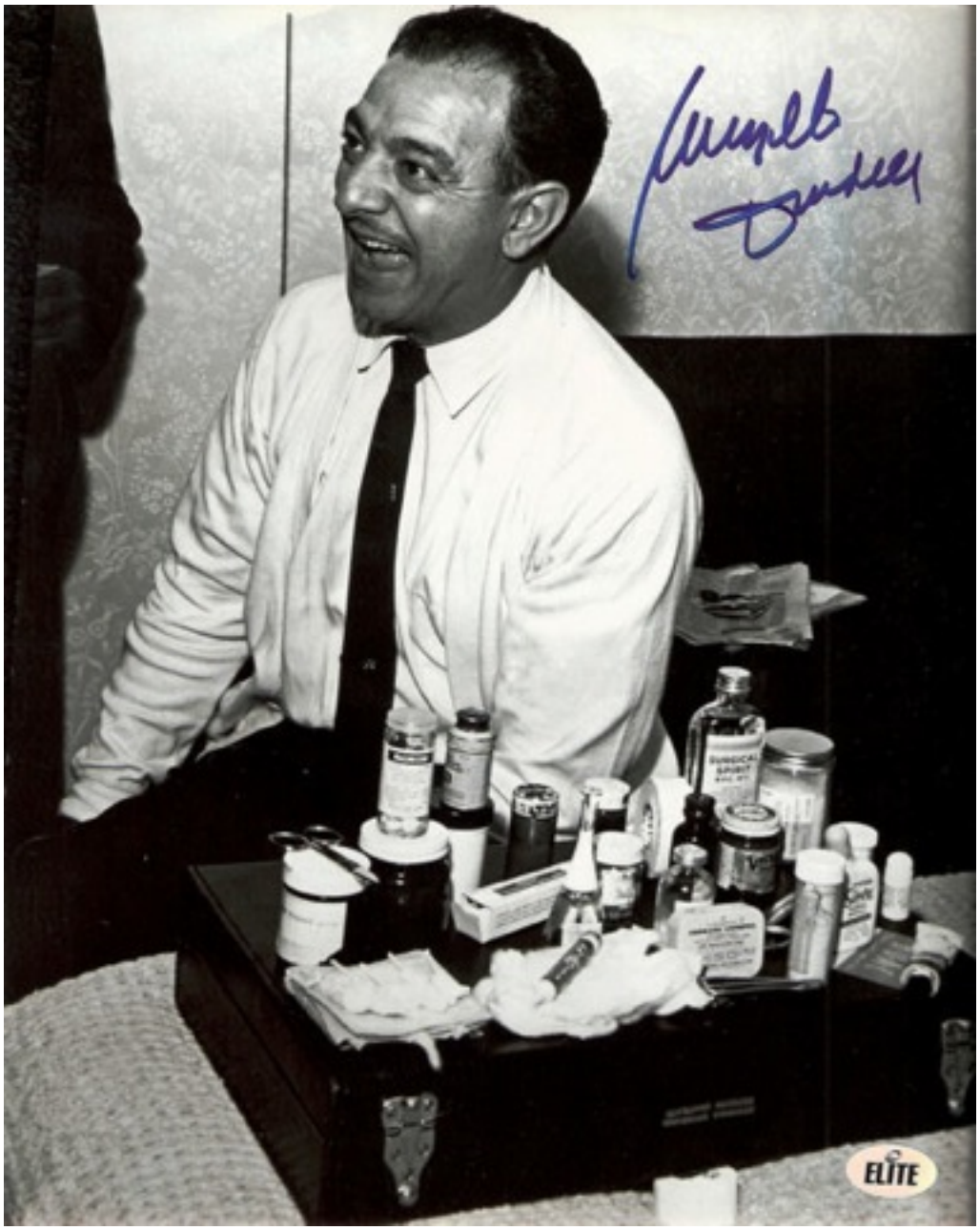

This week boxing lost another icon with the passing of legendary trainer Angelo Dundee. Dundee was 90 and it's doubtful that there's anyone around who could say they had a bad experience when they were in his presence or met him. Like the most famous champion he trained, Muhammad Ali, he had time for everybody and loved to talk boxing. There are so many great stories yet to be told that will be emerging in the next week or so detailing his great career as a boxing trainer and cut-man, and you can count on all of them being positive and to no ones surprise. The accomplishments of his distinguished career as a boxing guy are numerous and each and everyone of them is probably a story in of itself.

However, the crowning achievement of Dundee's career is something that he didn't do when at the time he was pressured to, but instead followed his intuition and let nature and history take it's course. And that is he understood the style and personality of the young Cassius Clay who had just turned pro. Angelo wasn't the first trainer to try and develop Clay during the infancy of

his career, it was former light heavyweight great Archie Moore, who was still a semi active fighter when Clay turned pro.

The problem was Moore was to old school for the 18 year old Clay and was set on breaking his bad habits of carrying his hands down by his side and pulling away from punches with his chin exposed. Moore was to regimented for Cassius and believed for him to succeed he had to adopt a more conventional boxing stance and style. Also, Archie wasn't star struck by Clay and even had the nerve to treat him as just another boxer in the gym and dared to request that he sweep up the gym after he was through training.

Well that went over like a led balloon and soon Moore was out as a potential longtime trainer of Cassius Clay soon to be Muhammad Ali. Enter Angelo Dundee who was brought in by the Louisville sponsoring group who represented Clay. Dundee realized that Cassius wasn't just another fighter. He saw that Clay was possibly the exception where he could go against the book and yet everything would still turn out alright. He also grasped Clay's personality and how he had to be coddled and treated like a superstar before he actually became one.

Since Dundee's passing we've heard how he stayed out of Muhammad Ali's personal life and business. Yet he supported him every step of the way during the 20 plus years he was the chief second in his corner on fightnight. And that was regardless of the fallout and consequences that usually ensued. As some may have forgotten, Ali wasn't always adored by the public and being associated with him wasn't the best thing for ones image. That says a ton about Dundee the man and is a terrific endorsement of his character. However, Dundee's real impact on the boxing world is that he never once flirted with the idea of trying to change Muhammad Ali, the fighter, into something he wasn't.

Imagine the heavyweight division in the 60s and 70s with Muhammad Ali fighting in a more conventional style like Joe Louis or Ernie Terrell? Instead, Dundee allowed Muhammad to cultivate his own freelance style along the way. Little did we know then that it would present a match up problem for every contender and great of those two decades who came along the way that wasn't named Joseph William Frazier. And despite the style disadvantage, Ali managed to take two of three bouts against Joe.

The legend of Muhammad Ali has been well documented and the story has been re-told a million times. Hopefully now with the passing of Angelo Dundee, the man who checked his ego aside and let Ali be Ali, he will get more recognition for his brilliant insight and decision for not trying to push a conventional style on Ali somewhere between 1960-61.

Because of Dundee's insight and easy going manner, Muhammad Ali became the most famous boxer/athlete in history. No other heavyweight fought like him before he arrived on the scene

and it's doubtful that we'll ever see another the likes of him again. Remember, Dundee didn't just let Ali's style evolve, he also fought his own generation's belief and foundation and stepped back and let Ali's personality and charisma blossom. On top of that, Dundee made it fun and as a result he and Ali both had a ball along the way.

Thanks Ange!

Personal Note: During the mid-late 1990s I hosted a boxing show on ESPN Radio 1490 called Toe-To-Toe. Dundee was a guest on the show three or four times. What stood out was he always answered the phone when I called before we went on the air and he would stay on and talk or take calls as long as I wanted. I still have the tapes from the show and will perhaps go back and listen to them with the intent of relaying what we discussed.

Two things that immediately come to mind is him telling me how Ali came back to the corner after the third round of his first fight with Joe Frazier, saying "I thought this guy was easy to hit? I can't find the SOB." And the other was how I really tied to push him on who was the greatest of the three great welterweight champs (Carmen Basilio, Luis Rodriguez and Sugar Ray Leonard) he worked with. And he wouldn't budge. The closet thing he made to a commitment was saying, Rodriguez had faster hands than Leonard, but Ray was the harder puncher. He also said that Basilio would've had his way with both Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad who were dominating the welterweight division at that time.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Great trainers don't change any fighter. They enhance, build on and perfect what a fighter has. [Make dat muthasucka into a whup-a$$ machine.] And by the way, Archie "Old Mongoose" never tried to change the young Cassius Clay's (yCC) so-called bad habits. Often the wrong story and bullsh*tology lives for too long and go completely unchallenged for tons of years.

The Old Mongoose was trying to change the complete style of fighting of the young Cassius Clay, because the white powers that be didn't dig it and told him to. That style reminded the oldtimers, [of those days] who were still racistly running stuff of the hated "Unforgiveable Blackness" Jack Johnson.

So the 10 rich white men of Louisville, who were sponsoring yCC, hired the Old Mongoose to

change Clay to be more flat footed and stand upward and less "jiggy wiggy." In the USA South, jiggy wiggy black heavyweights were consider disrespectful -- and remindful of Jack Johnson -- to the black laws and white powers of those times. They believed that sexual subliminal messages were being sent to "lilly-white women."

One can go to Youtube and hear Muhammad Ali brag how he "took many ways of Jack Johnson's style of fightin'" for himself. The late, great Angie Dundee didn't play racism and trained for the best benefit of the fighter. Angie also played no politics or stereotyping. He was da MAN for in his own words, "My fighter....I woulda taken shot at any (so-called supporter/sponsors)."

The Louisville Group, as it was called, even told Angie to speak to yCC about Malcolm X and other Muslims hanging around. But Angie told TLG that he does "not get into the personal, private lives and business of any my fighters," and that TLG needed to butt out of "da kid's religious choice and the type of company that da kid keeps."

Angie was one of a kind. An honest to the bone, great, sweet human being. There will never be another trainer -- IMHO -- like the solid-10-plus Angie. Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW! I musta' fo'got! That was some nice, NICE, sweet, SWEET copy! I'm man enough to say that I read it several times and it made me cry. Holla!

Coxs Corner says:

I always wondered how Ali would have turned out if he had boxed in a more conventional style. But there can be no doubt with the results. Angelo did right by allowing Ali to develop as he did. The bad part is that a lot of wanna be boxers got themselves beaten up trying to emulate Ali. Ali was one of a kind and few, if any, possessed his remarkable athletic gifts of speed, agility and durability. Dundee demonstrated keen insight to see this attributes in Muhammad and allow them to develop.

Radam G says:

Ditto Coxs Corner! You hit that one outta da park! You are such RIGHT! A lot of fighters got their arses tore up trying to emulate the GOAT Ali. This is because they didn't know how the optical illusion was done. If you don't know the working of the magic, your arse will end up being a tragic. Holla!