

Featherweight Orlando Cruz Announces He Is Gay

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 04 October 2012 10:01



Orland Cruz, in 2009. (Hogan Photos)

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Featherweight boxer Orlando Cruz, a 31-year-old Puerto Rico native, has come out, and announced that he is homosexual.

The southpaw, who turned pro in 2000, and owns a 18-2 2-1 record, with 9 KOs, put out a statement which loudly and proudly told the world a secret that he has been holding on to. "I've been fighting for more than 24 years and as I continue my ascendant career, I want to be true to myself," Cruz said. "I want to try to be the best role model I can be for kids who might look into boxing as a sport and a professional career. I have and will always be a proud Puerto Rican. I have always been and always will be a proud gay man."

Cruz repped Puerto Rico in 2000 Olympics. He is set to fight on Oct. 19, against 20-4 Jorge Pazos in Lorida. he has won two straight, over Michael Franco and Al Delgado, after losing two in a row, to Cornelius Lock and Daniel Ponce De Leon, via stoppage.

My take: Bravo. Good for Mr. Cruz. Boxing hasn't seen such a public pronouncement from an active participant. Hall of Famer Emile Griffith battled rumors that he was gay, in his heyday, but kept under wraps his lifestyle, for the most part. The issue came to a head when a foe, Benny Paret, called him a "maricon," a slur for a gay man, at the weigh-in for their March 24, 1962 bout. He'd mocked Griffith before their second bout, with a limp-wrist routine, and added injury to the insult by winning a split decision. Before their third scrap, held six months later at Madison Square Garden, Griffith lunged at Paret, but got full-on revenge hours later during the bout. He thrashed Paret badly--threw about 24 unanswered blows-- to the point that Paret suffered brain damage, and died, ten days after the bout.

The Virgin Islands native Griffith didn't go out of his way to protect his preference; more than once, he'd head from a fight at Madison Square Garden, still in his trunks, and put on mink coat, and head to a gay-friendly bar to unwind. Why didn't he tell the world? "Promoters wouldn't touch him," said former light heavyweight champ Jose Torres in a 2005 Sports Illustrated article on Griffith. "It wouldn't bother me, but most fighters would hate him. And then, if someone loses to him? *You lost to this gay guy? Get out of town!*"

To the writer, Griffith danced, parried, countered lightly. "I will dance with anybody," he told Gary Smith. "I've chased men and women. I like men and women both. But I don't like that word: *homosexual, gay*

or

faggot

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. I don't know what I am. I love men and women the same, but if you ask me which is better ... I like women."

Griffith had to wrestle with the issue privately and publicly during a different era. Despite some holdouts, the continued presence of some dinosaurs of that era's ignorance and bias who still cling to the belief that one makes a conscious choice who one is attracted to, our society has advanced immeasurably in the arena of tolerance and acceptance of gay people, athletes and otherwise. CNN anchor Anderson Cooper confirmed in July what many knew, that he was and is gay, and was met with not much of a ripple. Shoulders were shrugged, and that, friends, is progress, mighty progress. By now, only the remarkably stubborn, and some would argue, remarkably hateful and judgmental, attach a judgment to a person based on who they'd like to smooch with. My guess is that Cruz might hear of a couple stupid zingers on Twitter, but beyond that, I think his announcement will be like Cooper's. The world will keep spinning, and after not too long, we will forget about his sexual orientation, and assess him as we would any other boxer. Can he punch? How is his chin? Of course, we do already know about his heart, his reservoir of guts...He's got loads of heart and guts. Bravo, Mr. Cruz, you scored a KO win with this announcement, and you have helped another bunch of young people, some of them boxers, yes, summon the courage to tell their friends, and family and the rest of the world that they are gay, and proud of it.

[Comment on this article](#)

deepwater says:

live and let live.every person should be able to do what they want as long as it doesnt hurt someone else. boxing is boxing and sex is sex. I kinda like to keep it apart because when you start mixing it you get pics of delahoya dressed as goldie locks. good for him but I dont wanna see.lol. if there is any special rights based on sexual preference I would like to get some of those special rights for the people that support doggy style. i like doggy style better then missionary. next time i get put in the misionary position I need to say damn it women! you are violating my rights! I am a doggy style man and i will not tolerate this abuse of my right to doggy style! fight for your rights people!

Radam G says:

What OC did is WHACKY! And the muthasucka has faded as a boxer, and is trying to get a front page. Boxing is macho inside that squared jungle. Outside that SJ, nobody gives a double fudge what you are. In dat SJ, if you can fight, you're aight!

Boksing is the "threatre of the unexpected" in every avenue. It is what goes down inside the ring of bang, bang! Who you get your nasty on with is not worth a hill of beans. And you can SANG, SANG! Boxing is no longer OC's means. His being gay is a none story. Da muthajoke is

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just trying to get some of Emile Griffin's glory. Holla!

Radam G says:

OC is delusional. A playa knows when a dude has sugar in his tank. It is something that is just innate. When a cat is twisting, instead of struttin,' you already know. Gays have a distinction that can be noted. Just as women have certain innate appeals that would cause a man a meltdown. OC is the latest-trying-to-get-attention clown.

Sorry! But he got a none-interesting story. He would have deserved it, if it were newsworthy gory. Holla!

leon30001 says:

Uh, yes...congrats, Orlando, for the notable achievement of being gay! Well done! Props and what have you! Let's get a damn parade going shall we! My what a guy!

deepwater says:

whos next sergio or floyd? j/k .another joke= if the other boxer beats him in the ring or curses him out during the fight do federal hate crime charges follow? thats actually not that funny but what the hell. good luck to cruz because some macho fans will let him hear it during the fights.

riverside says:

I'll stick to the don't tell don't ask policy, BTW, thanks for inf. Orlando.....@ DEEP, my boy is fighting at turning stone casino in Verona new york on the 27th vs Karim Mayfield on HBO, is that on your neck of the woods?

dino da vinci says:

You know, deep water makes an interesting point. Where is the line pertaining to the buildup of any gay fighter and his opponent. Where will the line be drawn? Where will the line be where boxing has to answer to real life? An example if you will, is: How did Mike Tyson not get charged with some type of criminal aggravation charge when he bit off a piece of Evander Holyfield's ear. All caught on camera, no less. Activities in the ring aren't immune to criminal prosecution. I offer up one of the sports world's ultimate crumbcakes James Butler, Jr as proof. This could get interesting.

Mike, I was always under the impression that Emile insisted that it wasn't true. I happen to remember a story Pat Cassidy wrote for TSS, where Emile asks Pat if he's heard about all the horrible things people were saying about him? Also, hadn't heard of his appreciation of women.

deepwater says:

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cool man, its north of me. mayfield is pretty good man. good luck.

deepwater says:

hey dino I was there for butler. butler took that cheap shot and should be banned. he was arrested because ray kelly the police commish was there in there front row along with 500 other cops. no ray kelly and cop brass there I dont think he woulda got cuffed. either was butler is a pos for what he did. boxing is a slippery slope because look at all the assaults that happen at weigh ins and such. riddick bowe larry donald was an assault but nothing ever happened on that one.

SouthPaul says:

Butler also attacked Grant when the fight was clearly over. I'm thinking had Tyson bit off Evander's ear post fight..he'd likely have been charged... specially if there was someone willing to press charges.

deepwater says:

yeah butler is a clown for that cheap shot. it was kinda nuts when it happened in that venue because it was a 9/11 charity thing and all the brass was there. All the cops started chanting lock him up lock him up and they did. I think if all those cops werent there he woulda got booked a few days after. its like a gunman trying to hold up the cashier at a cop convention. ohhhh sh7t i forgot that mf er killed kellermans lil brother. he choked him out or something out of state. I seen kellerman not long after that and i bought him a drink. max kellerman misses his lil bro and that wack job caused it. the cops should of giulinianied butler instead of that other poor bloke.

Radam G says:

D da v, Emile was always an outta of da closet queer. Dude was the nephew of "Old man Griff," the late trainer of "Boom Boom" Mancini. And Old man Griff resided in San Diego, Cali, for years until the day he died. I saw a lot of Emile visiting his uncle for my whole life . Emile was gay as gay could get. I can remember him going out with U.S. Navy sailors and Marines who loved that sugar in Emile's tank. Dude was a he-she ho from da flo' up. Holla!

brownsugar says:

Been wondering,..... ever since I since I saw the movie: "Ring on Fire" the Emille Griffith story,... how long it would take before gay fighters became brave enough to face public opinion. In 2012 the Gay lifestyle is so prevalent it's hardly a shock when someone announces their chosen sexual bias.

But it's something that's more associated with hair dressers, fashion designers, waiters and

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budding actors than athletes who make a living in the grimey sport of boxing..

(if you are a hairdresser, an actor, fashion designer or waiter,.... please don't be offended,.. just talking about stereotypes)

personally I don't have the energy to waste hating the decisions other people make if it doesn't affect me directly or indirectly.

maybe this will motivate Cruz to dig down and excel,.. because he has to know,... that no boxer who competes at the elite level, wants to lose to a Gay fighter.

Maybe promoters can market him in gay-centric towns like Atlanta, Frisco and Cincinnati, the possibilities for Cruz to capitalize from this are endless.

Who next??

Radam G says:

Not wanting to fight a gay or lose to him is just juice for the talking heads and scribes. A fighter doesn't want to lose period. Boxing has always been like those "hair dressers." (Matter of fact, you have fighting barbers and hair dressers all up in the game. They be braiding hair and shining bald heads and giving massage on more than heads on shoulders. Maybe you guys forgot about Sugar Ray Leonard coming out and telling how he was ___ ___ by a trainer/coach.)

Those in da game know that we have a lot of gays -- men and women. And losing to one ain't Jack or Jackie Sue.

Dude who would lose to a known gay, would dismiss it by claiming "that queer is c0ck strong 'cause he ain't ever got none." No pride of a pugilist has ever been lost because a gay whopped dat'@ss. In dat squared, it is mano-i-mano or chica-i-chica. You just got your arse whipped on night or day in question.

Combat is combat. Gays get @\$\$ whopped. And gays whopped @ss. And it is all about the pay. And for that BIG moola, everybodee and dey momma are gonna play. Holla!

the Roast says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;20708]Been wondering,..... ever since I since I saw the movie: "Ring on Fire" the Emille Griffith story,... how long it would take before gay fighters became brave enough to face public opinion. In 2012 the Gay lifestyle is so prevalent it's hardly a shock when someone announces their chosen sexual bias.

But it's something that's more associated with hair dressers, fashion designers, waiters and budding actors than athletes who make a living in the grimey sport of boxing..

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Who next??[/QUOTE]

Don't worry B-Sug, as an Actor, the Roast is not offended.

brownsugar says:

@ Roast, You got right brother.

brownsugar says:

@Radam... I can't argue with your extensive experience on the subject.Well said !

SouthPaul says:

Cruz putting the sweet in the science! Him emerging from the closet.. It's neither surprising or shocking or revolutionary. Be you, my friend, don't trip. I ain't.

Radam G says:

Hehehe! SP, dude is putting giant sugar cubes in it. WTF! I know a lot of sweet britches, but he's sweet trunks. OOPS! I musta' fo'got! I know a lot of those too. How much will their trunks sell for at an option? Haha! Maybe you can get a mint for Emile's.

BTW, some of you scribes ought to do piece on the fighters that the late, great Liberace -- the sweet britches entertainer/piano man -- managed. [BTW, sweet britches is a slang term for a gay, not offensive.]

Danggit! Being a game fly on da wall and in laps, as a kid -- now that I think back -- I saw a of lot hanky-stanky [I mean -panky] that I did not understand as a rugrat. What da double FUDGE! Now I see da light. And I wish that somebody turn dat ____ OFF! Haha!

My five-year-old son told me that the next he's in the USA, he is gonna WHUP Mick Romney's arse for wanting to can Big Bird. I just thought that I would throw that it. Hehehe! Holla!

ali says:

I hope Orlando Cruz announcement gives Sergio Martinez the balls to come clean.

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Radam G says:

SCLA Ali, you are "basically" hinting that SM is dirty with gayness. Hehehe! Dude will "clean" your clock. Holla!

leon30001 says:

hey if he's trash talking, the other guy can say he'll eat his kids, send him home in a body bag, hell maybe even look to drive his nosebone in to his brain...but if he refers to his sexuality expect a big media furore and some "hate crime" action! And old Woodsy most likely will be all over it! [I]That's[/I] America, baybee!

spit bucket says:

What if he likes the guy in the other corner? Talk about a of interest... But otherwise it was a brave thing to exit the closet.

Here's an interesting article about Emile Griffith & Benny Paret. Some pictures on the NYT website

Junior, the Kid, the Fight

By DAN KLORES

Published: March 31, 2012

Fifty years later. If you are Lucy Paret, though, the impoverished widow of Benny, a two-time welterweight champion of the world, you're hardly calling this an anniversary. Fifty years ago, you decided to stay home in your Bronx apartment building the night your 25-year-old husband was pummeled to death — March 24, 1962 — by the challenger Emile Griffith, a former champion, on live television, an ABC "Friday Night Fights" special.

[Enlarge This Image](#)

Associated Press

The referee Ruby Goldstein and millions in front of their TVs watched as Emile Griffith pummeled Benny Paret.

[Enlarge This Image](#)

Associated Press

The unconscious Benny Paret was taken from Madison Square Garden on a stretcher. He died after 10 days in a coma.

It's been a hard life. One child, the one with whom you were pregnant that night, sits in a Florida Panhandle state penitentiary, more than likely for the rest of his days. The other, Benny Jr., 52, handsome and personable, is beginning to find himself. The boxer's pension? Never happened. Life insurance? Ten grand come and gone. Sitting in your cramped Miami studio apartment — bed, bath, closet, kitchen, coffee cup — retired after years as a cashier in the strip mall, once a lovely, sexy, proud dancer, you approach every March with dread. Fifty years since the neighbor ran to her door, knocked and said, "Senora, senora, algo malo ha ocurrido."

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(“Something bad has happened.”) Benny was hurt, clobbered, taken from the Madison Square Garden ring by stretcher.

Fifty years since the referee, Ruby Goldstein, having just been lionized on “The Ed Sullivan Show” for stopping a bout before a fighter got “really hurt,” choked. That night, he watched, too, as did millions of Americans — in the lower left-hand corner of the television screen, the black-and-white blows that never stopped as Griffith crushed Benny. Even the gangsters, the jocks and the movie stars at ringside were thinking this might have gone too far. The smelling salts failed, too.

The ambulance from St. Luke’s drove up. The reporters feigned sensitivity. The 10-day coma, the funeral home, the Cuban mother-in-law arrived, courtesy of Pan Am. She detested you as a light-skinned Puerto Rican, wondered about the purse, went back home, and you never heard a word from her again. Fifty years of struggle, of never feeling good enough about yourself to marry again, of daily routines taking their toll, of occasional visits to his grave in the Bronx.

He entered the ring that night, battered four months earlier by a human bulldozer — the bigger, stronger, tougher middleweight champion Gene Fullmer, who rocked him so badly that the Kid (that’s what they called Benny) should never have been allowed back in the ring. But the New York State Athletic commissioners and the doctors said he would be fine.

The Kid was illiterate in two languages. He had arrived from Cuba a few years before Fidel Castro took over. His family stayed behind, so he was left trusting his older, wiser, charismatic manager, Manuel Alfaro, a successful entrepreneur and nightclub owner. They had a plan. After he beat Griffith, Benny would have a few additional title defenses, then he could own a butcher shop on the Grand Concourse. It would mean success.

Lucy? “Nah. Not for me.” She never liked the fight game. She didn’t get a thrill watching him get whipped. Manuel, however, had all the answers. He had most of the \$35,000 purse, too. He had Benny’s ear, mind and body. She wouldn’t go to the Garden that night. She would sit at home with the baby, while Adolfo played in her belly.

Emile Griffith grew up as a man-child at a boys’ detention home in the Virgin Islands. With a body by David, 28-inch waist, 46-inch chest, 146 pounds, he spent his adolescence and early teenage years standing in brutal heat, barefoot on rocks, forced to hold water buckets in each arm, punished for whatever sadistic thoughts entered the minds of authority figures, thirsty for escape. At night, the men or bigger boys came to him. They took.

Soon his Mommy moved to New York, the immigrant’s dream, but left the children behind. The oldest of eight, Emile got the call first a year later to come north, where he played baseball, swam, defended the weak on the Harlem streets. A grade-school dropout, with a high, delightful, innocent singsong voice, he started moving racks part time in the Garment Center. Emile was “discovered” by two young men, the Irish trainer Gil Clancy, a World War II veteran with a master’s degree in education, and the Jewish garmento Howie Albert, a big-time personality and ex-fighter. “It was the only partnership in history,” Clancy quipped, “where the Irishman and Jew teamed up, and the mick had the brains.”

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Emile became a Golden Gloves legend. He climbed the professional ranks quickly. The myths and narratives created a clean biography: he was a hat designer, creative, and he loved blonde Scandinavian beauties. Two facts were straight, though. He was a vicious counterpuncher, and after each victory, he honored Mommy's dream by moving up one of his siblings. Soon, he bought a house in the Hollis section of Queens, for the entire clan.

Clancy kept his prodigy away from the gangsters Blinky Palermo and Frankie Carbo, who had "owned" a bunch of previous champions, including Don Jordan, the welterweight king Paret first beat in 1960 to become the world champion. Soon after, however, Emile took the crown from Benny, who then won it back, setting up the rubber match on March 24, 1962.

Emile's escape became the gay bars around Times Square, private places of peace, affection and sex.

"Where does he go?" Clancy said. "I don't know," his brother or Albert would reply. "Has anyone seen my Junior?" Mommy said.

One friend was shot, crippled for life. Emile cried and cried. The pain made worse with no one to tell.

He got to the weigh-in the day of the fight, not the absurd Don King/Bob Arum sideshow of today. Just a bunch of scribes from the city's seven daily newspapers and a few still photographers. Benny wanted an edge. Manuel gave it to him. The Kid patted Emile on the behind and drew his lips close to Emile's ear. He whispered a gay slur in Spanish, "Maricón, maricón." Emile, shaken, looked around, hoping no one else had heard. He then lunged at Paret, his tormentor. Their handlers jumped in to break it up.

Clancy spent the afternoon walking Emile, 24, around the long Manhattan blocks between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. His mission was to calm down the man-child so he would be ready to beat Paret senseless. He certainly wasn't going to address the humiliating insult. No matter, Benny got his edge. In the sixth round, he shocked the Garden crowd, flattening Mommy's favorite, Junior.

At home, boys and men, fathers, uncles and granddaddies sat glued to their 18-inch Admiral TVs as they did every weekend night. "Friday Night Fights," their moment to be together. It was the 1960s, and pop psychologists hadn't yet come up with terms like bonding and sharing.

For 12-year-olds like me, who liked "the fights," the routine was an early lesson in deception and love. The voice of the announcer Don Dunphy, accompanied by the sponsor's Madison Avenue jingle, began at 10 p.m. sharp, which was either too late to stay up or meant it was the end of the workweek for your struggling father who simply wanted to watch the fight alone. A chair, an ottoman, a Piels and red pistachios. "Go to sleep," was the order. You went to the bed, turned out the lights, got under the sheets, told your little brother if he said a word, he was finished, and turned the 12-inch on low, getting ready to watch, praying that they didn't hear, rush in and turn the TV off.

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Every week, I kept a running list in pencil, on loose-leaf paper: the date and site, who fought, their weight and the results. I kept score, too, according to the 10-point round system. I was self-taught and hid the evidence between the hardcover books on the manmade shelves, somewhere between Jack London and Quentin Reynolds. I was either too young to recognize that he had to know I was “cheating,” or too needy to understand that he didn’t care that I was trying to reach out to him. What I loved were the combatants. They didn’t leave like the Duke and Furillo and Gilliam. They were tough men: Sugar Ray, Basilio, Paul Pender, Terry Downs, Tiger Jones, Spider Webb, Florentino Fernandez, Luis Rodriguez, Hurricane Carter, Joey Giardello.

Emile fought back. By the 10th and 11th rounds, he took control of the fight. By the 12th, he had killed Benny.

Bottom left-hand corner. He was trapped in the ropes, one arm draped over, the other doing anything to stop the blows: 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, maybe more, all to the head. Benny’s arms stopped moving. So did Goldstein’s legs. Finally, Manuel jumped into the ring. Emile had reclaimed his title.

Every dubious politician worldwide was enraged. Wagner, Rockefeller, the local New York State hacks, the Vatican, the Diet of Japan, British Parliament spewed “abolish the sport.” They succeeded in going home to tell the wife to watch them on TV or to read about them in The New York Times.

Ten days in a coma. Once, while talking to Benny, Lucy felt his hand move. “Maybe,” she said. “God has heard my prayers.” A few months later, she gave birth and moved to Miami, her place in history etched in his tombstone. They became anecdotes.

Eventually, Emile got back in the ring. He won and lost the welterweight and middleweight titles four more times. He fought way too long, even married a woman, which lasted a few months. Joe Frazier was his best man at a lavish affair at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills.

How can you possibly be the same? How can a man endure the trauma of killing another while being told that nothing had changed?

In 1992, 15 years into retirement, he walked out of a gay bar near New York’s Port Authority. Five teenage thugs, one carrying a baseball bat, decided to mug him. They never figured the tipsy old man was a six-time world champion. He fought back and lost. The brain damage, compounded by more than 200 prizefights, was severe. Even then, at 54, Emile got off the pavement, took the subway to Queens, his head battered as if a piñata, bleeding; ribs, jaw and spleen broken. His cries and moans awakened Luis, his lover and “adopted son,” asleep in their basement enclave. Startled, he yelled for Mommy to get up. They took him to Elmhurst General Hospital, where he spent the next four months.

Lucy has been at the side of her two sons, no matter the fault. She has aged with grace and dignity, but with no money, no help, no in-laws, no benefits. She remembers 50 years ago. She can see Benny’s smile, sometimes hear his voice, but there is no touch, no embrace, no

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comfort in the legend.

Emile no longer worries. He lives in a nursing home in Hempstead, N.Y. Clancy and Albert have died. Only Luis and his biographer and friend Ron Ross visit. His dementia has no cure. Emile fought more championship rounds at Madison Square Garden than any other fighter in history, but he stands alone, naked as the lion that enters the Colosseum.

Dan Klores, a Peabody Award-winning filmmaker and playwright, directed “Ring of Fire: The Emile Griffith Story.”

spit bucket says:

Conflict of interest if he likes the opposing fighter... Here's a link to a good NYT story about the last Emile Griffith/Benny Paret fight.

[url]http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/sports/emile-griffith-benny-paret-and-the-fatal-fight.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0