

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---



### **ARTURO THUNDER GATTI**

Unlike mathematics, where equations simple and complex can have only one correct answer, other subjects are open to individual interpretation. And one of the areas most open to personal perspective is sports.

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

Can we all agree that Pete Rose wasn't the most naturally gifted baseball player ever to pick up a bat or field his position? But "Charley Hustle" approached each game as if it were a life-and-death situation, and that laser-beam intensity enabled him to almost will his way to the highest hit total in major league history.

Basketball's Moses Malone? A Hall of Famer, to be sure, but hardly anyone speaks of him with the same hushed reverence reserved for fellow centers Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar or even free-throw-clanking Shaquille O'Neal. But the 6-10 Moses might have been the premier offensive rebounder ever, small hands and all, because he fought to corral each missed shot in his team's scoring zone as if he were a hungry wolf going after a T-bone steak. He won a ton of those battles, often against bigger, more athletic opponents, because he wanted to win them more.

The definition of "greatness" is a nebulous thing, as Civil War Gen. Lew Wallace noted when he wrote that "Beauty is altogether in the eye of the beholder." It is a sentiment expressed, in one form or another, over the centuries by deep thinkers ranging from Confucius to William Shakespeare to John Keats to Ralph Waldo Emerson to H.G. Wells to Aldous Huxley.

And so it is for fight fans who gaze upon the scarred, blood-splattered legacy of the late Arturo "Thunder" Gatti, whose posthumous induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame on Sunday in Canastota, N.Y., has stirred a level of controversy unlike any since 2002, when Sweden's Ingemar Johansson was enshrined amid charges that the former heavyweight champion did not have a sufficiently impressive resume to take his place among true immortals of the ring.

Oh, sure, Gatti was a fearless warrior who routinely fought through pain and adversity as few boxers ever have. He was a threat until the final bell of every fight, no matter how far down on the scorecards he was at any given moment, and his epic battles with Micky Ward (three times), Ivan Robinson (twice), Wilson Rodriguez, Gabriel Ruelas and Angel Manfredy generated enough electricity to keep the lights burning for a lifetime in any frequent spectator's memory. Gatti was a participant in The Ring Fight of the Year four times (1998, 1999, 2002 and 2003), a remarkable achievement viewed from any angle.

"You can't give any fighter higher accolades than to say he always gave fans more than their

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

money's worth," said J Russell Peltz, who held a 50 percent promotional share of Gatti (the other half belonged to Main Events) for much of the Italian-born, Montreal-raised, New Jersey-based fighter's career. "You knew you were always going to get great action every time Gatti stepped inside those ropes.

"I've heard all the arguments (against Gatti's induction). 'He never beat a fighter he wasn't supposed to beat.' Well, what does that mean? Look, it's not the Hall of Greatness. It's the Hall of Fame. Gatti carried East Coast boxing on his back for years. Without him, what would we have had in Atlantic City? We would have had nothing.

"Was Rocky Graziano a great fighter? No, he wasn't. But he was good for boxing. He meant something to the sport, and so did Gatti. I mean, come on. The people who don't think Gatti should be in there are jealous. They're haters, and there's a lot of haters around."

By Peltz's definition, Anthony Coleman qualifies as a "hater" because Coleman is firm in his opinion that Gatti does not pass the sniff test for having a plaque hung on the hallowed walls of the IBHOF. Writing in East Side Boxing prior to the announcement of those making the cut for inclusion in the Class of 2013, Coleman opined that Gatti's selection "wouldn't be as odious" as that of Johansson, but "I honestly feel that Gatti shouldn't be inducted into the Hall of Fame over far more deserving candidates ... Maybe all of this controversy would be solved if we created two Halls – one to honor the truly great boxers and the other to honor the fighters we give a damn about."

There is some merit to both sides of the argument, but one thing seems obvious. Even though Gatti has taken his eternal 10-count – he was only 37 when he died under mysterious circumstances in his wife's home country of Brazil on July 11, 2009, with Brazilian authorities ruling his death by hanging a suicide after initially charging Amanda Rodrigues Gatti with murder – he nonetheless figures to have the largest, loudest cheering section among the thousands in attendance. The other inductees – "moderns" Virgil Hill and Myung Woo Yuh, old-timers Jeff Smith and Wesley Ramey, pioneer Joe Coburn non-participants Mills Lane, Jimmy Lennon Jr. and Arturo "Cuyo" Hernandez and observers Colin Hart and Ted Carroll – might well have a lower controversy quotient, but then none of those names stir fight fans' emotions to the same crazy-high degree.

After Gatti thrilled still another sellout crowd in Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall with still another blood-and-guts victory, a 12-round unanimous decision over Italy's Gianluca Branco for the

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

vacant WBC super lightweight title on Jan 24, 2004, Carl Moretti, then a Main Events vice president, smiled and said, "His right hand hurts again, his left eye's swollen, we had a packed house. It must be an Arturo Gatti fight."

Gatti himself often acknowledged that his stand-and-trade style not only catered to his pugilistic strengths, but to his thirst for meeting opponents head-on. Whoever walks away from the smashup wins. Boxing strategies don't come much simpler than that, or more crowd-pleasing.

"That's who I am, that's how I fight," Gatti said before he grudgingly relinquished his IBF junior lightweight title on an eighth-round stoppage against Angel Manfredy on Jan. 17, 1998. "Fighting the way I do is what made me a world champion. Maybe I could fight a little more cautiously, but that wouldn't be me. I've come to accept that."

What Gatti could not accept in the Manfredy bout was being prevented from fighting on, despite the cascade of blood flowing down his swollen face from the gaping gash that was opened over his left eye in the first round. The cut got progressively worse until ring physician Dominic Coletta felt he had no choice but to halt the carnage on medical grounds. "He basically was fighting with one eye," Coletta said of the half-blinded Gatti.

Gatti, of course, was vehement in his contention that he had Manfredy – who was leading by two and three points, respectively, on two of the official scorecards, with the third even – right where he wanted him.

"(The cut) was the only reason he won the fight," Gatti complained. "I would have knocked him out in the later rounds."

Even Manfredy had to marvel at Gatti's ability to soak up punishment like a sponge when a more prudent action might have been for him to fight more defensively in an effort to protect the eye.

"Once he gets hit, he always goes berserk and tries to trade," Manfredy said. "Everybody gets to Gatti because he's easy to hit. He took a beating from Wilson Rodriguez. He took a beating

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

from Calvin Grove. He took a beating from Gabriel Ruelas. But he hung in and won those fights. You have to give him credit for that.”

The suits at HBO, who made it a common practice to exercise contractual “out” clauses with fighters if they lost fights televised by the pay-cable giant, thus reducing their marketability, never seemed to hold it against Gatti when he came up short. Even after he was outpointed in his next two fights following the bloodbath with Manfredy, typical barnburners against Ivan Robinson, HBO stuck with him because a few defeats did nothing to damage his burgeoning popularity. A Gatti fight, win or lose, was assured of producing high ratings and maximum drama.

“Arturo Gatti is not a human being,” Lou DiBella, then a senior vice president with HBO Sports, said after the second of his two slugfests with Robinson. “He is a Bizarro.”

But even Superman was powerless when exposed to kryptonite, and the Bizarro that was Gatti was revealed to be merely mortal against a pair of future Hall of Famers who clearly were way out of his class. Oscar De La Hoya had his way with him en route to winning via fifth-round TKO on March 24, 2001, in Las Vegas, and Floyd Mayweather Jr. had an even easier time cruising to a dominating, sixth-round stoppage on June 25, 2005, in Boardwalk Hall. After that mismatch, Mayweather haughtily dismissed Gatti as nothing more than a “C-plus fighter.”

It was Gatti’s failure to be even somewhat competitive with De La Hoya and Mayweather that his critics claim counts for more than all of Gatti’s bop-’til-you-drop successes against tough but second-tier opponents. Yes, the Gatti-Ward trilogy was mesmerizing, but it wasn’t Ali-Frazier. Although the courage and resilience displayed by Gatti and Ward was similar, they lacked that stamp of greatness that made Ali and Smokin’ Joe so very special.

A dispassionate examination of Gatti’s record lends some credence to the suggestion that he might not be as Hall of Fame-worthy as some. Despite his unquestioned status as a legend in Atlantic City, where he fought 23 times, his record there was a relatively pedestrian 17-6, with 12 knockout victories and four losses inside the distance. He couldn’t mount much of an attack in losing his last two fights in Boardwalk Hall, falling in nine rounds to Carlos Baldomir and in seven to Alfonso Gomez. After the beatdown by Gomez, even Gatti had to acknowledge that he had given all he had and there was nothing left in the tank.

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

“Hasta la vista, baby,” he said in delivering his farewell address through puffy lips. “I did my best. I came in thinking I could outbox him, but the ring kept getting smaller and smaller. I can’t keep taking this abuse no more.”

But Gatti – who finished with a 40-9 record with 31 KOs, 21 of those outings televised by HBO – is a fighter who can’t be judged solely by statistics. Like former WBC light heavyweight champion Matthew Saad Muhammad, who also made a habit of teetering along the edge of disaster in fights not meant to be seen by the weak of heart, Gatti’s ring appearances always elicited the sort of visceral reactions that defied conventional analysis. His many fans loved him because he went to hell and back in a gasoline overcoat and was unafraid to spit in the eye of the devil himself.

“I have to admit that Saad Muhammad beat better-quality fighters,” said Peltz of the Philadelphian whose 1998 IBHOF induction drew few yelps of outrage. “He beat Marvin Johnson twice. Johnson is probably a better name on Saad’s resume than anybody Gatti beat. Saad also beat Yaqui Lopez twice. He beat John Conteh. The greatest fight I ever saw is still Saad’s first fight with Marvin Johnson.

“But Gatti and Saad were the same kind of fighter. They’d be getting beat to a pulp, then all of a sudden they’d come back and score a knockout.”

Saad Muhammad, maybe more than anybody, can relate to who Arturo Gatti was and what he was all about.

“It’s a man thing, beating hell out of somebody and him beating hell out of you, then hugging each other at the end,” Saad said prior to his IBHOF induction. “Being in that ring, you learn respect. You learn to give it, and to get it.”

[Comment on this article](#)

**Carmine Cas says:**

RIP Arturo Gatti

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

### **tlig says:**

Arturo Gatti's defence was his offence. Nope, it was his face. Dude took offence if you missed him with a shot.

### **leon30001 says:**

I love Gatti but don't personally consider him a great fighter. However he should be in the HOF considering some of the other names in there.

### **Radam G says:**

Just so people will know. It is called the "Hall Of Fame." Not the hall of great[s]. Of course there are tons of fighters in the HOF who were not considered "great" by many. They are there for FAME, not greatness or winning titles. Ken Norton never won a world-title fight. And he is there.

Gatti is a person of FAME. He belongs in the Hall of Fame! And the last that I checked, there is no Hall of Greatness. Long LIVE, GATTI! Holla!

### **kidcanvas says:**

gatti deserves it more than anyone i know right now, pacquiao,mayweather,cotto... he fought like a fighter should , always gave everything to the end ... who ever didnt vote for him is insane and never had a fight in their life..morons

### **amayseng says:**

I agree with Radam.

He carried east coast boxing for years.

Was he elite no.

Was he exciting \*\*\*\* ya he was.

And he was a warrior.

I think he was a great fighter.

He fought years past his physical prime and that shouldn't take away from his achievements.

### **Matthew says:**

I think you can make a case for Gatti getting in eventually, but I certainly wouldn't induct him in his first year of eligibility. He was always fun to watch, and yes, he was in some great battles, but lots of B-level fighters are in terrific scraps and are not under consideration for the Hall of

## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

Fame. I think the induction of Norton and Johanssen is far more egregious than Gatti getting in. Neither one of those guys has any business being in Canastota, except as visitors. I think the analogy of Saad Muhammad and Gatti is accurate, except that Saad Muhammad beat better fighters and had more title defenses.

### **leon30001 says:**

Yes and Butterbean is (was) also a person of FAME, but he really isn't under consideration for Canastota I hope.

### **leon30001 says:**

[!]It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. [!]

Yeah but so was, say, Dominic Guinn. Is he HOF-bound? Only joking I'm being facetious. Nice prose, all true!

### **Radam G says:**

OMFG! True DAT! You are being very facetious. Dominic Guinn is apparently regional known. Gatti was globally admired. Guinn is probably HOF-regional bound. Gatti was all WORLD! Just as GOAT Ali "Shook up da WORLD!" Gatti excited and entertained da WORLD!

And it is about da FAME, babbbeeee! Look in the dictionary, and by it would be Gatti's name. Holla!

### **jzzy says:**

Deepwater said it all, Gatti wasn't the most physically gifted boxer, but his legacy of heart grit, and sheer force of will is unmatched. He brought alot of fans to the sport and he more than deserves to be enshrined in the IBHOF. RIP

### **ali says:**

Radam your right but u should have to be a great fighter to get in the HOF. If u never won a title ain't no way in hell u should be in the HOF that's ridiculous.

### **Radam G says:**

You may be right, SCLA Ali. It is odd that Ken Norton never won a title bout, but he is there.



## Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---

Kennedy McKinney won two division weight titles, but he was bytch crying when I saw him a couple of months ago, because the posers -- I mean the powers that be -- won't invite or put him in the HOF yet. Holla!

### **Shoulder Roll Defense says:**

The HOF should be reserved for great fighters and Gatti was good, but far from great. He lost everytime he fought "A" level competition. Will Glen Johnson get in? Probably not, but he is an example of a fighter that has to be inducted if you let a fighter the caliber of Gatti in. I can go on and on naming fighters that are far more deserving than Gatti, but haven't been inducted yet. Gatti's first ballot induction into the HOF has cast a black eye over all of the truly great fighters that deserve to be there.

### **ali says:**

[QUOTE=Shoulder Roll Defense;31811]The HOF should be reserved for great fighters and Gatti was good, but far from great. He lost everytime he fought "A" level competition. Will Glen Johnson get in? Probably not, but he is an example of a fighter that has to be inducted if you let a fighter the caliber of Gatti in. I can go on and on naming fighters that are far more deserving than Gatti, but haven't been inducted yet. Gatti's first ballot induction into the HOF has cast a black eye over all of the truly great fighters that deserve to be there.[/QUOTE]

Your 100% right

### **Radam G says:**

Casting a black eye is what the seedy biz does so well. So with the famed Gatti being selected in the HOF, it should cause no hell. Holla!

### **amayseng says:**

There's nothing but black eyes all over this sport but we love it anyways.

Boxing brings out the best and worst in humans.

Tyson losing his mind and biting part of evanders ear off.

The u have ward and Gatti go to hell and back 3 times and become great friends.

The best and worst out of humans.

# Arturo Gatti's Greatness Is In Eye of the Beholder

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Wednesday, 05 June 2013 07:26

---