

"I Thought Dundee Would Live Forever"

Written by Rick Folstad
Friday, 03 February 2012 11:50



I thought he'd live forever.

Over the last few years, Angelo Dundee never seemed to age. He just seemed to grow wiser, maybe a little shorter. He was a bald Italian icon with a million stories to tell and a life expectancy of about 110. At least that's what I hoped.

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He was boxing's goodwill ambassador, a guy who was always looking ahead to the future and never paying too much attention to the past. And what a past he had.

"Eighty-eight and never been late," he told me one afternoon at a training camp in Tampa a couple years ago. "And I'm doing great."

That was Dundee, always sharp and alert, always willing to talk if you asked him a question.

In his last few years, he kept popping up at boxing shows, at boxing gyms and at boxing functions in the Tampa Bay area, a 90-year-old legend hanging around the fight game, drawing a crowd and bringing a little life to everyone's party.

The trainer of 15 world champions, the list includes Carmen Basilio, Jose Napoles, Ralph Dupas, Willie Pastrano, George Foreman, Sugar Ray Leonard and his most well-known work of art, Muhammad Ali.

Dundee was a major player in all of Ali's fights, including the "Thrilla in Manila" against Joe Frazier and the "Rumble in the Jungle," against Foreman.

Even at 90, Dundee would talk about finding a new heavyweight contender and taking him to the heavyweight championship of the world. He never stepped away from boxing, but lived as close to it as he could get, always looking for prospects and bragging up the game.

His giddyup had slowed down over the years and his heart took a beating in December 2010 when Helen, his wife of 58 years, died at the age of 85. But his wit and humor weren't gone for long.

"Ninety years. He had a helluva ride," said legendary boxing matchmaker Johnny Bos, who lives

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in Clearwater, FL just a few miles down the road from where Dundee lived in Palm Harbor. "I saw him at his wife's funeral over a year ago and I wouldn't have given ten cents for him to last another month. He had the bad hip (from a slip) and he was hunched over in a wheelchair and his wife had just died. But he made a tremendous comeback. I had lunch with him about a month ago in Clearwater and he was walking around and seemed fine."

Dundee, who died Wednesday night in Tampa Bay with his children and grandchildren close by, recently traveled to Louisville, KY to celebrate Muhammad Ali's 70th birthday. And Bos wondered if that hadn't taken a little out of him.

"He always looked forward to the future and you never heard him say a bad word about boxing or anyone in boxing," Bos said. "I think he was the greatest spokesman boxing has ever had."

I remember calling him a day after his 90th birthday in August to tell him happy birthday. He wasn't in, so I left a message wishing him the best. The next day, he called me and apologized for not getting back to me right away and to thank me for remembering his birthday. I didn't tell him, but his birthday was one of the fight game's worse-kept secrets.

Inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1994 and the Florida Boxing Hall of Fame in 2009, Dundee had a favorite saying he lived by and would repeat every time it needed to be said.

"It don't cost nothing to be nice," he'd say.

He practiced what he preached.

I guess I was right. In a way, he will live forever.

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ali says:

R.i.p dundee

brownsugar says:

The Title is aptly named, because it was precisely what I was thinking when I heard that Dundee had past. He was still giving interviews and appearing on internet talk shows. Thought he was going to live forever. With the passing of Dundee,.... an entire ERA passes that will not long be forgotten. RIP <0> <0>