Emanuel Steward was an important part of my professional life and also my friend.

He was one of my “go-to” guys. Whenever I was researching a major article - whether it was on fighters from the past or the contemporary boxing scene – I’d call Emanuel. We’d talk about what made this fighter great or how an upcoming bout shaped up. He was unfailingly generous with his time and knowledge. Over the years, we fell into a routine of getting together for lunch or dinner whenever I was on site for an *HBO World Championship Boxing* or HBO-PPV fight. He wasn’t a snob like some major players on the boxing scene. He treated low-level Internet writers, career club fighters, and everyone else he met with respect.

Emanuel won a national Golden Gloves title in the bantamweight division at age eighteen. After that, he worked as an electrician, an insurance salesman, and a cosmetics distributor. Along the way, he began training fighters and turned the Kronk Gym in Detroit from a neighborhood recreational center into one of the most famous gyms in the world. He was as good behind the microphone as any expert boxing commentator ever. But his greatest impact on the sweet science was as a trainer.

"There's a special bond between a fighter and his trainer," Emanuel told me years ago. "Often, they're the closest two people in camp. Look at the young men who become fighters. Many of them never had a father at home when they were growing up. Or if the father was there, he wasn't a positive influence. So when the relationship between a fighter and his trainer is right, oftentimes the trainer becomes a father figure and the fighter's best friend. The two men develop similar thought patterns and become spiritually synchronized with one another.”

Like many great trainers, Emanuel had a gentle exterior. But a fierce competitive fire burned within. Recently he told photographer Howard Schatz, “The worst experience, not just in boxing, in my life, of pain I experienced was [Thomas Hearns] losing the first fight with Ray Leonard. That was really the most painful experience I’ve ever had. For about a week, I would sit at home and I would cry almost like a baby. I was a mess. I’m a very very hard loser. I may seem gracious as a loser, but losing is hard on me. It’s harder than even on the fighters.”

Hilmer Kenty was Emanuel’s first champion. The first superstar that he developed from scratch was Thomas Hearns. Lennox Lewis and Wladimir Klitschko sought Emanuel’s counsel after hitting bumps in the road, and he helped elevate them to new heights. Hundreds of fighters have borne his imprint over the years.

Michael Buffer summed up the feelings of these fighters and everyone else in boxing when he said of the ritual ten-count for Emanuel, “I don’t know how I’m going to get through it.”

Emanuel loved boxing. And boxing is better for his contribution to it.

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