

## Abel Sanchez on The Boxer-Trainer Relationship

Written by Raymond Markarian  
Monday, 09 December 2013 11:57

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There is an unwritten code of ethics among boxing trainers that I am just now starting to learn. It's not easy to see. And the trainers might not speak of it frankly. But they know it's true.

You don't step on another man's toes. You don't mow another man's lawn.

Abel Sanchez speaks of the code and told me much more about the boxer/trainer relationship.

Sanchez trains Gennady Golovkin, the undefeated power puncher and middleweight champion. He also owns one of the hottest boxing gyms in the country in Big Bear, CA. Sanchez said that he knew before anyone that GGG was a destructive force in the ring. But he refuses to take full credit for GGG's emergence.

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Sanchez doesn't like to change his fighters and says that they think too much. But he wants them to follow his lead.

Call it a boxing contradiction. Teaching fighters mindless activity in the thinking man's game sounds like a new concept. Sanchez argues a cohesive boxer/trainer relationship eliminates fighters having to think for themselves.

Ain't that something?

Read on. You just might learn something new about boxing.

**RM:** Why did you choose Big Bear to train fighters?

AS: I grew up in Southern California. I started to come to Big Bear in the early 90's. I trained Miguel Gonzalez out there when he fought Oscar De La Hoya at Joe Goossen's gym. Then I noticed the property was so cheap and I got so many fighters it was almost like I couldn't do anything else.

**RM:** Do you think that you started getting more fighters because you had a successful gym? Or was it more about your relationships with the fighters?

AS: I started getting more fighters because of my history with the Norris brothers and other champions. When I opened my gym I had already worked with nine world champions. So everybody associated me with Norris. And around 2007 I started working with guys that really weren't superstars or big names, but they helped me get my act together again.

**RM:** You're talking Terry Norris, the former junior middleweight champ?

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**AS:** Yes.

**RM:** Now that you are training Gennady Golovkin, how do you compare Norris to Golovkin?

**AS:** Terry was a great athlete. He was a great basketball player. He actually had a four-year ride to Baylor. He was more of an athlete. Gennady is an exceptional fighter. He has more of a purpose in the ring. Terry was more reactive. He didn't have a plan. He would react to his opponent.

**RM:** What's the difference between them?

**AS:** Three years ago I sent an email to Robert Morales, a writer that I went to high school with, and said, that I have a fighter (Gennady Golovkin) that is better than Terry Norris ever was. I said that three years ago. And it was not that I was trying to put Terry down but there was a big difference in the type of fighters that they were. To tell you the truth, Orlin Norris was a better fighter than his brother. But he just didn't have the killer instinct that his brother had. I trained Orlin Norris to a cruiserweight championship.

**RM:** I see. So you're saying Terry had the athletic ability to adapt in the ring and Golovkin is more of a...

**AS:** He is more of a fighter. He is more of a warrior. Gennady will abuse you and take things away from you. Terry would react to you.

**RM:** Right. OK. I hear you. You see, I talk to a lot of trainers and love to learn from them. Angelo Dundee was someone I always talked to. He told me that every fighter is different and it is up to the trainer to adapt. He said you have to train every fighter in a different way. Do you agree with him?

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**AS:** No, I don't. I've always had a trusting relationship with fighters. I am the coach and they are the fighters. They trust me with their careers for my judgment, my knowledge, and experience. It's like I told Gennady four years ago, he allowed me to do what I needed to do with his attributes. I told him four years ago that he would be the most avoided fighter and the best middleweight in the world, and we wouldn't be able to get a fight for him. That is exactly what is happening today.

**RM:** That's funny.

**AS:** I wrote that on the board for him during the first couple of months he was at my gym. Unfortunately, with today's fighters we coddle them too much. We allow them to do too much thinking. Instead of trusting the coach, we allow them to listen too much to what other people outside of the camp are saying. And that is why we have a bad Olympic team. We get these coaches that are not qualified to run a team and the kids don't listen to him. So, if a guy doesn't want to listen it's a big problem.

**RM:** That's true.

**AS:** Because when they lose, guess who loses, the coach loses, not the fighter. They blame it on the coach. But when they win, they win by themselves.

**RM:** That's a good point.

**AS:** So, if I can't do it my way and they are going to blame it on me, then I want it to be my fault.

**RM:** So, when you say the fighters listen to other people, what other people are you talking about? Do you mean other coaches?

**AS:** Look Ray, when fighters start to have success, all of a sudden everybody else knows what

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they need to do. They have new friends. Everybody else knows how they need to train.... Now they need a defensive coach. Or now they need a strength and conditioning coach. Think about when Freddie Roach started training Amir Khan. Khan got beat because he doesn't have a chin. And everyone said Freddie needs a defensive coach. They said Freddie is a great offensive coach but he can't teach defense. But here is the truth, every fighter is different and coaches have their own way of teaching. And if the fighter doesn't like a coach then he should go somewhere else.

**RM:** So, losing is not the coach's fault?

**AS:** Look, we try to get the most of the fighter. But not everyone is going to be Manny Pacquiao or Floyd Mayweather or Bernard Hopkins. There is going to be guys that lose.

**RM:** OK. You're saying the trainer and fighter must have the same mindset. Correct?

**AS:** Absolutely, when the fight gets tough and you are sitting in the corner with your fighter, there has to be trust. It's just like Rios' fight with Pacquiao. When Brandon Rios is in the corner with Robert Garcia, Brandon needs to trust Robert.

**RM:** Right.

**AS:** We coaches can look at it from the outside and say 'he needs to do that or he needs to do this,' but Robert and Brandon worked on certain things.

**RM:** Yes.

**AS:** So, Brandon needs to listen to Robert and not one of his buddies that never had a fight in his life, or another coach that never had any success with anybody. When Robert Garcia tells Brandon something and Brandon doesn't get it, after spending five years together then they are on not on the same wavelength. That means Brandon is not getting the benefit of Robert's

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experience.

**RM:** I hear you.

**AS:** That's the same thing with my guys. If the fighter and trainer are not on the same wavelength then it's not going to work. It can't work. When you have outside influences and friends or other coaches that supposedly know everything, those are the people I am talking about. Unfortunately in this business we have other coaches trying to advise someone else's fighter. And it messes with the fighter's mind and more importantly, messes up the cohesiveness of a team.

**RM:** Do you run into a lot of those issues with coaches?

**AS:** I don't because I am a very outspoken person. I say what I want to say and I don't beat around the bush. If people don't like me then people don't like me. I'm not going to allow another coach to step in my gym and try to coach you, especially if we have spent some time together. I'm going to be the first to tell that guy to shut up and leave my fighter alone. That's my fighter, you know.

**RM:** Yeah. There needs to be more respect among trainers?

**AS:** Yes. Those coaches are not in the gym everyday with my fighters. They don't know what their process or mind is. There are so many things in the mind of a fighter that trainers have to know. So, we have to respect the coaches that spend the time with those fighters.

**RM:** That makes a lot of sense Abel. So let's say Brandon Rios came up to you before the Pacquiao fight to ask for advice, what would you do?

**AS:** I'd call Robert. I'd call Robert immediately. In fact I would call Robert in front of Brandon.

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**RM:** OK.

**AS:** That's just out of respect. We as coaches need to respect the fighter and trainer relationship. When Robert says Brandon and me aren't working together then it's open season. But until then, you have to have the respect for the coach.

*You can follow Ray Markarian on Twitter at [@raymarkarian](#) or email him at [Raymond.markarian@yahoo.com](mailto:Raymond.markarian@yahoo.com)*

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**dino da vinci says:**

AS: Because when they lose, guess who loses, the coach loses, not the fighter. They blame it on the coach. But when they win, they win by themselves...when fighters start to have success, all of a sudden everybody else knows what they need to do. They have new friends. Everybody else knows how they need to train.... Now they need a defensive coach. Or now they need a strength and conditioning coach...But here is the truth, every fighter is different and coaches have their own way of teaching. And if the fighter doesn't like a coach then he should go somewhere else.

Yes, Abel is correct. He's correct an awful lot.

Many years back, I had a fighter and decided to conduct an experiment. I wanted the fighter to spend a week with four different trainers, and have the fighter tell me who he thought would best suit him. I spoke with the trainers beforehand and they all agreed to give it a shot. Memory being what it is, I'm certain of Freddie, virtually certain of Dub Huntley, with Al Stankie, Jesse Reid, Abel Sanchez and way outside possibility of Coach (Kenny) Adams rounding out the group. What I do recall was four being the right number, and we finished week one and two with Freddie and I believe Dub. On the Saturday after the second full week, the fighter happened to be at our gym and asked if he could spar with one of the Weaver triplets, to which I ok'd. At the end of one round, the kid was spent. I told Troy it would be just the one round, and took the kids gloves and headgear off. I gave the fighter some time to himself, then walked back over and noticed he was crying. I asked him if abnormal fear was his problem. He

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assured me it wasn't. (I believe him. He wanted to spar with everybody). He told me it didn't matter how talented or untalented the sparring partners were, he'd be winded quickly. The kid suffered from severe asthma, and that was the last round he sparred in the US.

I tell you the above story because the kid came to the US from Germany with the hopes of becoming a world champion. And looking into a man's eyes when the realization first flickers and takes hold that the dream will not become a reality is heartbreaking. I'd say it would have the initial feel of losing a loved one.

Back to Abel. I watched his work for a long time and I can assure you he is amongst the very best that applies his craft in this most difficult of sports. And with Abel, you get the added benefit that he's a great guy as well.

Last note: I've always said when trying to determine who is going to win a prizefight beforehand, if the fighters are amazingly even on paper, look at the corner, that can be the deciding factor. I'll also add on a rare occasion I've found myself rooting against a Sanchez fighter with mixed results and that to do it too often would be a recipe for going broke. Any fighter agreed to be taken on by Abel should consider themselves extremely fortunate.

### **SouthPaul says:**

Good read..including Dino's input (love the stories).

### **Radam G says:**

Ditto Dino! Abel is a producer of champs. And he can even up the games of the tramps. Betting against him will be a losing record for the best of gamblers.

YUP! And great -- even good -- trainers TEACH just about every fighter differently. Bodies are not brains. Anybody and his sidekicking d\*\*\* can see every body, but only the great and really good can teach and reach nearly every brain up in dat hard-@ss cranium.

One way fits all will never be. And it is a BIG shame nowadays that too many of the one-and-only trainers are not getting the whole nine for victory. Holla!