

Winner of Ali-King Essay Award Are Announced

Written by The Sweet Science
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November 21, 2012, Union City, NJ --Alongside a prominent class of twelve Hall of Fame Inductees, three youth were recognized at the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame Banquet on 8 November, 2012. Joseph Rinaldi, Chance Solem-Pfeifer, and Nafisa Umarova were the recipients of SARTONK's inaugural Ali-King Award.

Their essay submissions were selected as the top three by a panel of five judges. Named after Martin Luther King, Jr. and Muhammad Ali, the contest's aim was to inspire critical thinking about the history and social significance of boxing. "We chose these men for their tireless struggle and fight for the cause of common good. And through the invocation of these exemplary men, we strove to highlight boxing's fighters and agents of constructive social change," described Hasmig Tatioossian, before she presented the awards at the banquet. Tatioossian, SARTONK's Director of Community Affairs, also spoke to the need for literacy promotion among boxing youth.

Jeanette Salazar, Director of Public Relations at the International Boxing Federation, one of the sponsors of the contest, agrees: "Opportunities such as this one inspire and motivate the young people involved in our sport, as well as the young fans, to continue on with their education."

The submitted essays ranged from autobiographical analyses of boxing to the role of boxing champions in society and the growing presence of women in the sport. In his essay, winner Chance Solem-Pfeifer reflected about the heroic role champions play for their communities: "There's a magic to the boxing champion. When we talk about fighters who capture the public imagination, we're appealing to the idea that one man's struggle in a boxing ring for 36 minutes is a community's struggle for recognition: to push out of society's margins, to push out of poverty, to push out of discrimination. Whether the champion should elect it or not, when the gloves are laced up, he is a symbol."

"In reading the essays, it was clear to us that the writers understood the connections between boxing and the social and economic realities from which many champions have emerged. It was important for us that youth think critically about this sport, and I feel we've achieved this," commented Tatioossian.

The winners weren't the only ones excited about their awards. Their families and boxing fans at the Hall of Fame Banquet congratulated the efforts of all the writers and applauded the contest.

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Award recipient Joseph Rinaldi's father, John Rinaldi, had this to say: "Boxing is such a wonderful sport and I believe that Sartonk Designs did a great service to boxing by giving young people a chance to put into words the positive aspects of the sport of pugilism. In its glorious and storied history, boxing not only provided soaring achievements to individuals, but to society overall. A young voice is what the sport needs to survive in today's world. To be sponsored by a company that has single-handedly provided a flair of class to boxing with their spectacular championship belts, it was an honor to see my son win the first Muhammad Ali-Martin Luther King, Jr. Award. The Award was a magnificent one with its sculpture design."

Crowning the awards package, which included tickets to the Hall of Fame Banquet and a book stipend, was the Ali-King Sculpture, designed exclusively for this contest and unveiled at the banquet. Iconic images of Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King, Jr. emerge from opposite sides of the sculpture, capturing the fierce spirits of these leaders. "They both fought -- in different ways -- for equal rights and respect among all peoples. We wanted to capture Ali's expression in his moment of victory over Sonny Liston, and King's pensive gaze. The sculpture represents them individually, but also synthesizes their struggles and spirits," described Edward S. Majian, President of Sartonk Designs.

In thinking about the future, Majian reflected, "This is only the beginning. We'll continue to work for literacy promotion in boxing and we invite others to join us. It was through the boxing community that we made this happen -- our sponsors, judges, and concerned gyms. We are so grateful for everyone's support!"

The essays were evaluated by Professor Gordon Marino, Michael Woods, Sonya "The Scholar" Lamonakis, Professor Anna Brown, and Ryan Maquiñana. The Awards were sponsored by the WBO, IBF, WBA, IBO, NJ Association of USA Boxing, NJ Boxing Hall of Fame Committee, Gleason's Gym, and Global Boxing.

The winning essays are posted on SARTONK'S website: www.sartonk.com . Follow SARTONK on Facebook and Twitter for quotes from all the submitted essays:

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