



PADDY BYRNE. A TRIBUTE.

11th August 2023

I was very sorry to get a telephone call yesterday from Tommy Gilmour Jr. informing me of the death yesterday of former manager, promoter, second, agent, matchmaker, cutsman 'par excellence' and our mutual friend, Paddy Byrne (real name 'Nicholas') at the age of 96.

Paddy, a Dublin-born Irish Catholic, once told me that until he became an adult he never knew that there were such people as Protestants, let alone other religions.

His career in boxing must have commenced in the 1950s and he pretty much did it all in the sport outside the ropes. I am not aware if he ever boxed but his knowledge of what made the game tick was matchless. He promoted at London's famous small hall, Manor Place Baths, the Cunard International Hotel in Hammersmith and in later years, Hove Town Hall. Among the boxers he managed was British Light heavyweight Champion, Young McCormack and Brighton's popular Tim Moloney.

He was the first to promote Hastings starlet, the wayward Paul 'Fireball' Huggins who never quite achieved his potential but for a brief period brought a lot of excitement to England's South Coast. Paddy's reputation extended world-wide and the list of promoters he worked with extensively included Mogens Palle, Rodney Berman and Barney Eastwood. He also worked as a cuts man for World Champions such as Ayub Kalule, Michel Kessler and Barry McGuigan.

After the retirement of matchmaker Al Phillips, Paddy worked in that capacity for National Promotions, popularly and possibly libellously known as 'the cartel' – Jarvis Astaire, Mickey Duff, Mike Barrett and Terry Lawless. Paddy told me that Mickey Duff said to him when he started, 'How come after all the years we've known each other we've never worked together?' Paddy replied, 'But we never liked each other'.

Paddy also told me that in their younger days Mickey would sometimes ring him in the early hours of the morning and ask, 'Are you awake – I can't sleep'.

Ever the joker, he travelled with me on an aeroplane to Denmark for a flight there and when the stewardess asked us if we would like some refreshments, he replied, 'My friend here likes his steaks well done but could you make mine a little more rare'. He repeated the routine on the return journey.

He took the great Ken Buchanan, also recently deceased, to newly independent Zimbabwe to box Langton Tinago.

Paddy told me that after Ken had weighed in under the contracted weight Tinago weighed in considerably higher. When Paddy protested, the inexperienced promoter told him, 'That's right. Buchanan was contracted at one weight, Tinago at another'.

Needless to say, Paddy told him the facts of life regarding boxing contracts and Tinago had to lose weight.

After we had both retired, I used to visit him in his house in the fashionable Brighton Marina where he lived with his wife, the lovely 'Marge' and I used to take him to the nearby Café Rouge for

something to eat washed down with a few glasses of wine (probably me, as I don't recall he was a big drinker).

I last saw him some years ago when we both attended the unveiling of a wall plaque in Brighton's Pimlico district, in memory of the great bare-knuckle pugilist from that area, Tom Sayers. He was over 90 then and very frail but the wit and humour was still there.

Latterly, he lived in one of former British and Commonwealth Champion, Scott Welch's nursing homes on the South Coast and following a chance meeting with Scott, earlier this year I enquired after Paddy and afterwards wrote him a letter as we had not had contact for a few years. Scott had told me that Paddy's memory was not as sharp as it used to be and I never got a reply.

When I started with Board of Control in 1979 thought I knew a lot about the history of the sport but soon realised pretty much nothing as to what made it work. Paddy was a major part of my education and I owe him so much.

Paddy was a great character and taught me a lot about the workings of the game. He's probably the last of that generation of post-war boxing names that shaped the sport up until the end of the 20th century.

SIMON BLOCK

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