

Boxing's Hall of Shame

The Fight Game's Darkest Days

Thomas Myler



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To my wife Betty who is and
always has been in my corner

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'All I've ever heard is how some scandal is another nail in boxing's coffin. You know, this coffin's got nothing but nails.'

Bruce Silvergrade, owner of Gleason's Gym in
New York, 1999



FOREWORD

Throughout its colourful history, boxing has had more than its share of scandal, both inside and outside of the ring. Almost from its very beginning, the sport has attracted a criminal element, and many boxers and non-combatants have risen from environments where obeying the law is less relevant than economic or physical survival. The violence that is prized in the ring has at times erupted in boxers' private lives, and stints in reform school or prison are woven into several champions' histories.

A continuing theme in boxing's chequered history is the fixing of fights. The sport is very susceptible to rigging. First, it involves only two active participants and only needs one to be convinced to throw a fight. Fixing team sports, in which there are many players and where events can occur more haphazardly, is much less practical. Furthermore,

boxing is essentially an entrepreneurial endeavour in which individual boxers must guard their own financial interests.

Lacking the kind of central authority established in other professional sports, boxing does not have rigorous procedures for self-regulation. Certain boxers, with the control of their careers in the hands of trainers and managers, and perhaps living from purse to purse, have been vulnerable to manipulation.

While no one can say for certain when the first fight was thrown, the first known fix by a Hall of Famer took place in 1822 when Englishman Jem Ward threw his fight with Bill Abbott. In more modern times, allegations of fixed fights have risen many times, although the charges have rarely been proven.

For instance, it was rumoured that Stanley Ketchel was to allow the great black heavyweight Jack Johnson to beat him, and in return, Johnson would take it easy on the lighter Ketchel. When Ketchel knocked Johnson down, some say Johnson was outraged at the betrayal. In any event, he responded with a ferocious attack which ended the fight quickly.

Action in other heavyweight boxing matches has raised cries of 'fix' as well. Many suspected Hall of Famer Jack Sharkey of giving less than his best when he lost the world heavyweight championship to the ungainly giant Primo Carnera. Sharkey vehemently denied the charges for the rest of his life, but Carnera had well-known underworld connections and won other fights in which his opponents took dives. Reportedly, Carnera's handlers arranged the fixes without his knowledge.

In the 1960s, the two Muhammad Ali-Sonny Liston title fights raised some eyebrows. In the first, the then champion Liston quit between rounds, refusing to get up from his stool because of an injured shoulder. Although the examination after the fight did reveal an injury, the seeming invincibility

of Liston and the shady figures with whom he associated cast doubt on the legitimacy of the fight's outcome.

In the second fight, Ali floored Liston with a short right which Ali dubbed 'the anchor punch' but some at ringside called it 'the phantom punch' because they never saw it. Confusion over the count by referee Jersey Joe Walcott contributed to the perception that the fight was not on the level. As with most boxing fix stories, the charges were never substantiated. It was never implied that Ali himself was involved.

Publicly confirmed fixes include middleweight Jake LaMotta's admitted fall to Billy Fox in return for a promised title shot. Middleweight Rocky Graziano was suspended by the New York State Athletic Commission for not reporting a bribe, and light-heavyweight Harold Johnson had his licence suspended for collapsing against Julio Mederos without being hit. Fans and boxing commissions alike have undoubtedly been duped at other times by unscrupulous figures whose influence on boxing has diminished the sport's integrity.

With some notable exceptions, boxing has always tended to draw its participants from the lower socio-economic strata. The streets of urban neighbourhoods have been a wellspring of aspiring boxers. Factors which discourage more affluent youths from taking up the sport – the risk of serious injury or disfigurement, the availability of many other forms of recreation and the lack of violence in everyday middle-class life – mean very little in dangerous neighbourhoods where violence and fighting are often a part of growing up.

Historically, youngsters particularly adept with their fists have been urged to channel their aggressiveness through formal boxing instruction. Unavoidably, the type of environment which fosters a career in boxing may also lead to tangles with the law. Several great boxers served time in youth detention centres or prison.

In his autobiography, *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, Rocky Graziano details the many youthful misdeeds that landed him in reform school. Sonny Liston learned to box in prison, and the young Mike Tyson was discovered by trainer Cus D'Amato while serving time in an upstate New York detention centre. Even boxers who came to be highly respected for strength and character, such as Archie Moore and Floyd Patterson, served time in reform schools.

Some boxers have been involved in criminal activities in their adult lives as well. Liston, who was strongly linked to St Louis racketeer John Vitale, was arrested numerous times, although sometimes he may have been the victim of police harassment. Hall of Famer Kid McCoy, whose gradual decline ended with suicide, was convicted of killing a woman with whom he lived and shooting three other people.

Carlos Monzon, former world middleweight champion and a national hero to Argentinians, was convicted of killing the mother of his youngest child by throwing her off a second-storey balcony, and Hall of Fame trainer Jack Blackburn killed his wife and shot two other people. In a case which received worldwide attention, Tyson was convicted of rape and served over three years in prison before his release in 1995.

Criminality is by no means the norm for successful boxers. Many have had stable home lives or followed their boxing careers with public service or youth work, but for some, the violence that defines the sport is not confined to the 'squared circle'.

Boxing has been tainted with widespread corruption at various times in its history. From the end of the 1940s to the late 1950s, the International Boxing Club (IBC) dominated the promotion of boxing in the US. Though primarily owned by James D. Norris, who controlled Madison Square Garden and owned three other major arenas, the IBC fell under the influence of mobster Frankie Carbo. Carbo and his associates also controlled the Boxing Managers' Guild,

which gave them strong influence over two aspects of the fight game: staging fights and controlling fighters.

The reputation of premier fight promoter Don King, a hugely successful figure on today's boxing scene, makes many observers uneasy. King, convicted of manslaughter in 1967 in connection with the death of a rival in the Cleveland numbers racket, has survived numerous scrapes with law enforcement authorities. An FBI sting operation, three grand-jury probes, an income tax evasion case and prosecution for insurance fraud all failed to prove King guilty of wrongdoing.

Questions about King's complex dealings seem to arise from an apparent conflict of interest when he acts as both promoter and manager. Although rumours indicate that boxers have been underpaid, few have complained publicly. According to a 1991 *Sports Illustrated* article by a former FBI agent who investigated King's alleged mob connections, the then world heavyweight champion Larry Holmes, managed by King, said in private that he feared for his safety if he cooperated with the government.

At its best, boxing is an unparalleled physical art. At its worst, it is a killer and maimer of good men. Blindness, hearing loss, mental impairment, respiratory or speech difficulties, paralysis and death are among the possibilities that lurk behind the glory of being a star in satin trunks. While serious injuries and deaths do occur in other sports – skiing and motor racing, for instance – boxing is perhaps the only sport where death and injuries are viewed as 'part of the game'. Financial or other pressures have led to more than one hurt or sick boxer fighting at extreme risk to his health.

The well-publicised case of Gerald McClellan, a 27-year-old boxer who received very severe injuries in his super-middleweight title fight with Nigel Benn in 1995, renewed calls for the outright abolition of boxing. A six-inch blood clot was removed from McClellan's brain in emergency surgery

following the title bout. The young boxer suffered almost total hearing and sight loss, cannot walk and will need lifelong care.

One of the most distasteful aspects of boxing injuries is the long-term effect on the brain of numerous blows to the head. The once-comic image of the punch-drunk fighter is a tragic reality for some ring veterans. The plight of one-time heavyweight contender Jerry Quarry came to light in both the boxing press and in the general media.

At the age of 50, Quarry had lost many physical and mental capabilities and could no longer care for himself as a result of the beatings he endured in the ring. Sports fans are also very familiar with the transformation of Muhammad Ali from a quick-witted, swaggering champion to a soft-spoken, slow-moving figure because of Parkinson's disease, perhaps exacerbated by his ring career. Brain injuries have shortened the productive lives of many other boxers and former boxers.

The dangerous nature of boxing has periodically led to calls for reforms, ranging from more thorough and frequent examinations to protective headgear. At various times, the US Congress has held hearings to discuss federal control of boxing, and, from time to time, movements to ban the sport have arisen. One of the most outspoken proponents for the abolition of boxing was announcer Howard Cosell, who, after many years of commentating on fights, became disgusted by a particularly brutal match.

Boxing has been part of human history for centuries, however, and it may never be 'civilised' out of existence. The promise of prize money, as well as the possibility of being the very best at something excruciatingly difficult, is a timeless lure to many talented young men.

James B. Roberts
Co-editor of the Boxing Register,
official record book of the

*International Boxing Hall
of Fame, Canastota, New York*

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FIXES, FAKES AND FINANCES

Boxing's appeal crosses all barriers, race, religion and, today more than ever, the sexual divide, with women's boxing gaining more momentum than at any other time in the sport's long and colourful history. Kings and commoners, princes and paupers, movie stars and mobsters, guys and dolls have all been brought together by the sport's indefinable glamour.

The 'Sweet Science', with its origins dating back over 8,000 years as a leisure-time activity in the Nubian valley of what is now Egypt, has a culture all of its own, and, it must be said, a chronicle of events littered with scandals and controversy.

Mind you, boxing is not the only sport smeared by disgrace and wrongdoing. Horse racing has not been free of doping and bribery. Track and field, cycling and swimming

have all had their scandals, while soccer has also come under fire with allegations of match-rigging.

Drug taking has also stalked rugby, while racism and homophobia are very much a part of ladies' tennis. Bribery, corruption and that recurring old enemy, drugs, have scarred the world's greatest amateur sporting event, the Olympic Games. Baseball has had its 'Black Sox' rigging scandal and golf its infamous 'Brookline 1999' tournament during which both the US Ryder Cup team and drunken fans shamed the game. Even that most aristocratic of sports, cricket, has been linked to drugs.

Boxing, the noble art, however, would appear to have come off the worst. Hardly a month passes without some new scandal breaking out, with seemingly ongoing investigations and probes. Then again, the underworld, particularly in the US and to a lesser extent Britain, has always flirted with the sport - and the sometimes sleazy, often raffish glamour of the 'squared circle' would appear to be part of its attraction.

Today, the sport has been cleaned up considerably; however, there is still a lot to be done. Although any true and accurate comparison between the bad old days and today is almost non-existent, frightening mismatches still mar the sport, and boxers long past their sell-by date are still pushing their hands into gloves and climbing wearily into rings around the world, risking life and limb. The last chance saloon is always open.

There are also far too many boxing organisations around the world, each with their own 'world' champions, and they rarely agree on anything. Nevertheless, the 'Mob' days of the 1950s, when the gangsters virtually controlled the sport in the US, would seem to be over.

Since America dominated the world championship scene during those years, it followed that titles were at the disposal of the mobsters and more or less freely available for them to manipulate. Boxing people scoffed at Hollywood

movies like *Champion*, *The Set-Up* and *The Harder They Fall* for depicting the sport in a poor light and implying that it was as straight as a winding mountain road. In truth, hoodlums and gunmen were very much a part of the sport in an age when guns and threats were as important as the ring and the ropes.

Though US boxing was officially controlled by the two major bodies at the time, the New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC) and the National Boxing Association (NBA), which would later become the World Boxing Association (WBA), the underworld held power. Earlier, in the 1920s and into the 1930s, gangsters like Al Capone, 'Lucky' Luciano, 'Legs' Diamond and John Dillinger had an enormous influence on the sport, and there was considerable evidence of fixed fights.

In the mid and late 1930s, promoter Mike Jacobs was frequently accused of having associations with the underworld, but his links with contender and later world heavyweight champion Joe Louis appeared to halt any spread of corruption.

Nevertheless, one of Louis's early managers, Julian Black, was a numbers racketeer and his first trainer, Jack 'Chappie' Blackburn, had served four years of a fifteen-year prison sentence on a manslaughter charge. Blackburn's most distinguished feature was a long scar that creased the left side of his face from ear to lip, a souvenir from a knife fight in a Philadelphia bar.

Later, when training Louis for his first fight with Max Schmeling in 1936, Blackburn was tried on a murder charge but was freed six days into the trial in Chicago when the prosecution abruptly decided not to go through with the case. Exactly whose influence or money was at work remained a mystery, but it certainly did not hurt matters that Blackburn was a top trainer who was needed to prepare Louis, a potential gold mine, or that the murder victim was black.

With most of the world champions in uniform during the Second World War, there was little activity among the boxing underworld, but in the immediate post-war years a new breed would come to the fore, such as Frank 'Blinky' Palermo, Felix Bocchicchio, Truman Gibson, Joe Sica and the man considered the ringleader, the notorious Frankie Carbo.

There is little doubt that Carbo had more power and influence than any other individual in boxing, including the members of the two leading commissions. He was able to control the movements of several world champions and top contenders through their managers, even though the boxers themselves, in many cases, were not consulted in the negotiations.

Carbo, who dressed in expensive grey suits, was also known as 'Mr Grey', or simply 'The Man In Grey'. He was born John Paul Carbo in a tenement on New York's teeming East Side in August 1904, and in such an environment it was not the most difficult thing to get involved in crime. At the age of 18 he was arrested for assault and grand larceny. When he was 20 he was charged with shooting a butcher to death in a poolroom on East 106th Street. Carbo and the butcher, a man named Albert Webber, were apparently arguing over possession of a stolen taxicab. At the time, Carbo was known variously as Frankie Carbo, Frank Fortunato, Frank Martin, Jimmy the 'Wop' and 'Dago' Frank.

To avoid arrest on the shooting charge, Carbo relocated to Philadelphia but was soon arrested there after a hold-up and sent back to New York to confront the consequences of Webber's demise. He was convicted of first-degree manslaughter and received a sentence of two to four years in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in New York. He absconded, however, and was a fugitive for four years before being apprehended once again.

Carbo served two years before he was paroled in 1930 when he became a fully fledged triggerman during the Prohibition wars, working most prominently for the Brooklyn

division of Murder, Inc. In 1931, he was arrested for homicide on a charge of killing a Philadelphian beer baron known as 'Waxie' Gordon in a hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He was released on \$10,000 bail but nothing came of the investigation.

In 1936, he was arrested during a boxing card in Madison Square Garden, New York, for the underworld murders of Max Hassel and Max Greenberg, henchmen for Waxie Gordon. Again, nothing more came of it.

Carbo's most notorious homicide was in November 1939 when, on Thanksgiving Day in Los Angeles, he was one of five arrested for the gangland slaying of Harry 'Big Greenie' Greenberg, a former member of Murder, Inc. Greenberg, whose real name was Harry Schachter, was also a member of Louis 'Lepke' Buchalter's gang in Brooklyn. The other four were Buchalter himself, Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel, Harry 'The Champ' Siegel and Emanuel Weiss, also known as 'Mendy'.

Big Greenie had been shot five times as he sat behind the wheel of his car on a quiet residential street. At the subsequent trial, Albert 'Tick Tock' Tannenbaum, a member of Murder, Inc., testified that Carbo fired the five bullets into Greenberg and that Bugsy Siegel drove the getaway car. He also named Mendy Weiss and Lepke Buchalter as accomplices. The case against Carbo seemed particularly strong, especially as there were several other witnesses, including Abe 'Kid Twist' Reles, another hoodlum, who said he saw Carbo heading towards the scene of the shooting and running away afterwards.

The trial in 1942 resulted in a hung jury, but the case for the prosecution was weakened in the second trial when Kid Twist, while under police protection, either fell or was pushed from his fifth-storey hotel window to his death. Carbo said he knew nothing of the incident. The jury decided that while they doubted Carbo's meandering and innocent gestures, they could not entirely trust Tick Tock

Tannenbaum as a reliable witness. After 53 hours of deliberation, Carbo was acquitted.

Carbo's name was also linked with the slaying in June 1947 of Bugsy Siegel in Los Angeles when mobsters sent a burst of gunfire through the living-room window of his palatial home in Beverly Hills. Two years earlier, Bugsy had built the Flamingo Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas after realising the potential of the desert town in Nevada as a gambling oasis. Indeed, he is credited as the man who started the Las Vegas gambling boom. The money for the Flamingo was raised from funds accrued by the Mob and loaned to Bugsy. When he reneged on his creditors, Mob boss Meyer Lansky put the finger on him and, allegedly, named Carbo as the man to finish him off. Carbo always denied any direct or indirect link to the killing, and like so many gangland murders of the period, it went unsolved.

Some years earlier, Carbo had become involved in the boxing scene. In 1936, the mobster Gabe Genovese, a barber by profession, was managing world middleweight champion Babe Risko, and he brought in Carbo as a partner. In the mid-1950s, Genovese would be cut in on the purses of world welter and middleweight champion Carmen Basilio and lightweight contender Ludwig Lightburn. He also collected money by force from New York promoter Norman Rothschild.

The law eventually caught up with Genovese in 1959 when he was sentenced to two years in a state penitentiary on Rikers Island in New York for operating as an undercover manager. New York's Assistant District Attorney, John G. Bonomi, described him as 'an evil and degrading influence on professional boxing for over two decades'. Genovese served a little more than a year and died soon after his release.

In the late 1940s, Carbo became a major influence in the fight game. He was freely acknowledged as the 'underworld commissioner of boxing'. From his New York offices in the

Forest Hotel on West 49th Street, Carbo used any method – bribery, bullying, threats, blackmail – to get his message across. He used his associate Frank Blinky Palermo, who managed world champions such as lightweight Ike Williams and welterweight Johnny Saxton, as a front man, and there were always willing managers like Bill Daly, known as ‘Squire’ and ‘Honest Bill’, and Willie Ketchum to help him manipulate other boxers.

When Ike Williams threatened to sack Connie McCarthy, one of his earlier managers, and manage himself because McCarthy was continually drunk and incapable of looking after the boxer’s interests, McCarthy went to the notorious Boxing Managers’ Guild, and they blacklisted Williams. Ike, however, soon came into contact with Palermo, who told the boxer he would ‘straighten everything out’.

Palermo, with offices in the Schubert Building on South Broad Street in Philadelphia, took over Williams’ contract from McCarthy, who got a ‘pay-off’ from Blinky. Ike got the fights he wanted, although Williams would later admit, ‘Palermo just robbed the hell out of me for my money.’

To his friends and associates, Palermo was simply Frank or Mr Palermo. He hated the Blinky nickname given to him by the media because of an eye infection, though some said it was because he could not look anybody straight in the eye. He had legitimate licences to manage boxers in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Maryland, California and Florida, but he would eventually lose them one after the other, even in his native Philadelphia. It was just that he did not really need a licence, as his alliance with Carbo meant that his power as an undercover manager was greater than that of any licensed manager.

Palermo’s police record was also extensive, with various misdemeanours dating back to 1928. As a bookmaker in 1950, he staged a running gun battle through the streets of Philadelphia in pursuit of a numbers runner who pocketed the pay-off on a big bet. He also operated a restaurant in

partnership with Sam Margolis, who had gangland connections and was not adverse to pulling the trigger on anybody he thought was trying to double-cross him.

In December 1942, Sugar Ray Robinson, then the uncrowned world welterweight champion, was supposed to carry Al Nettlow, who was handled by Palermo, for the full ten rounds in a fight in Philadelphia. In the third round, however, Nettlow landed a hard right hand, and Robinson lost his temper. He hit Nettlow with a powerful left hook which had him in so much trouble that the fight was stopped. That night Sugar Ray went down to the news-stand where Blinky hung out and tried to explain what happened. 'It was an accident,' he told the manager. 'I just happened to catch him.'

Blinky smiled, shrugged his shoulders and said, 'It's all right, Ray. Nothin' we can do about it now.'

Like lightweight Ike Williams, heavyweight contender Coley Wallace claimed he too was ripped off by Palermo. He recalled in 1996 that he was never paid for two fights: his fourth-round win over Bill Gilliam in New York in December 1953 and his knockout in ten rounds by former world heavyweight champion Ezzard Charles in his next fight three months later in San Francisco.

'I don't recall what my purse was for the Gilliam fight, but I was supposed to receive \$20,000 against Charles,' he said. Palermo paid him \$3,000 and did not offer any explanation. When Wallace pressed him for an answer, Blinky said the missing money had in fact been accounted for by 'unforeseen expenses'. Wallace also claimed he was drugged before the Charles fight, although he could never prove it.

Wallace had turned professional in 1950 after beating Rocky Marciano in a national tournament. Securing a title fight with Marciano after Rocky became world heavyweight champion, however, turned out to be impossible. 'I beat Marciano easily in the amateurs, but they wanted a white

champion,' remembered Wallace. 'Blinky told me if I wanted to fight Marciano, I would have to take a dive. I told him, "No, forget it."

'That was the fight game in the 1950s. You kept quiet or you didn't fight. I just let it go. That was boxing. I didn't fight for the title, but I have my pride. Frankie Carbo controlled boxing. You had to go to him, and the way to Carbo was through Blinky. I could have gone to somebody else, but without Carbo, you didn't get the big money or the big fights. Carbo controlled all the champions.'

Wallace's career eventually petered out and he retired, although he is probably best remembered by boxing fans for the 1953 movie *The Joe Louis Story* in which he played the 'Brown Bomber'. He also portrayed Louis in the classic 1980 film *Raging Bull*, although it was only a small part.

Up to the time of his death in January 2005 at the age of 77, he still talked fondly about *The Joe Louis Story*, which received strong promotion by United Artists, although it was not a commercial success. Coley had less happy memories of his association with his former manager. 'I get angry when I think about Blinky Palermo,' he remembered. 'He could have done better for me. He ruined boxing for me.'

The Boxing Managers' Guild was the brainchild of Carbo, and it allowed him to move in on the huge fees boxers were getting from television. Unofficially it was a kind of managers' union, but, in reality, it was a dictatorial organisation which threatened and bullied managers as well as boxers who refused to join. The message was clear: if you want to get the fights that matter, join the guild; otherwise, you're out.

Promoters were blacklisted, too, and sometimes beaten up if they did not cooperate or make the 'right' matches. Sam Silverman, for many years the leading New England promoter who put on most of Rocky Marciano's early fights, started to operate independently in the Boston area - and paid a high price.

One night a bomb was dropped into the basement of his home. Luckily, Sam was out at the time. A few days later, his wife was fortunate enough to be called to the phone when a bullet whizzed through a kitchen window. In the end they got Sam, who wasn't exactly a robust type of man. In a lonely back alley near his home, he was beaten up with a lead pipe wrapped in sackcloth. He survived but got the message.

One of Honest Bill Daly's boxers in the 1950s was the talented Vince Martinez, a leading contender for the world welterweight title. On 1 July 1954 in Los Angeles, Martinez outpointed Art Aragon, billed as the 'Golden Boy', and took an important step up the ratings. Five days later, Daly went to Martinez's home in New Jersey to split up a purse of \$27,000.

When Martinez saw that Daly was adding \$3,000 to the managerial expenses, he exploded. 'It's a rip-off,' the boxer yelled.

Daly barked back, 'What do you mean? What are you talking about? The money was spent wisely: \$1,000 was for air tickets and \$2,000 was for taking care of the referee and judges.'

In the ensuing argument, Daly stormed out and refused to meet again with Martinez. Vince appealed to the International Boxing Club (IBC), a blatantly monopolistic organisation but, at the same time, the leading promoters. The IBC offered to sign him to an exclusive contract. Martinez signed with them, but the IBC went back on their word after they got him just two fights at Madison Square Garden.

Shortly before the first one, against Carmine Fiore in October 1954, an unnamed source offered Martinez a straight \$20,000 to take a dive. He refused and reported it to the New York State Athletic Commission. 'The commission gave me police protection during the fight and even a motorcycle escort to the New Jersey line after the fight was

over,' he recalled. 'Nothing happened, except that I knocked out Fiore in the seventh.'

After the second fight, a ten-rounds decision over Al Andrews in December 1954, Martinez found himself on the blacklist. It transpired that the Boxing Managers' Guild, of which Daly happened to be treasurer, had imposed sanctions on the boxer. He was both unemployed and unemployable. Martinez had made the unpardonable mistake of ruffling Honest Bill.

'My father and my brother Phil decided we would try to make it on our own, and Phil applied for and got a manager's licence,' Martinez recalled. 'But we ran into a stone wall every place we turned. At first we couldn't understand it. Here I was, a top-ranked contender and not a promoter in the country could give me work. Then we found out. I was blacklisted.'

It took six months before the ban was lifted and only then through the intervention of an angry Julius Helfand, chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission. Helfand told his members, 'I'll clean up boxing or kill it,' but Martinez still had to wait nearly four years before he got his overdue and deserved title shot. Even then, it was too late.

With his best years behind him, Martinez climbed into the ring at the St Louis Arena in June 1958 to fight Virgil Akins, a 2-1 favourite, for the title vacated by Carmen Basilio, who had won the middleweight championship from Sugar Ray Robinson nine months earlier. In the first round, Martinez was battered to the canvas by the hard-hitting Akins no fewer than five times. In the second round, he was down twice more. In the fourth, he was sent crashing to the boards again. On rising, Akins dropped him for the ninth time before referee Harry Kessler, somewhat belatedly, waved his hands wide to indicate that it was all over without starting a count. Vince Martinez's dream had sadly ended.

When Johnny Saxton, who was managed by Palermo, won the world welterweight title from the talented Cuban boxer

Kid Gavilan on a 15-rounds points-decision in Philadelphia in October 1954, there was a public outcry over the verdict. Twenty of twenty-two reporters polled at ringside thought Gavilan should have won the dull fifteen-rounder. With Palermo's presence, however, the feeling before the fight was that Gavilan would need a knockout or a stoppage to make sure of victory in what would be his eighth title defence. 'I congratulate you - on your luck,' Frank Weiner, chairman of the Pennsylvania Boxing Commission, told the new champion.

Budd Schulberg, reporting for *Sports Illustrated*, wrote, 'Johnny Saxton may be an orphan, but no one can say he lacks for cousins in Philadelphia. Anyone who can clown his way through 15 listless rounds and still be rewarded with a world championship must have a covey of doting relatives.'

Dan Parker, in the *New York Mirror*, wrote, 'Jack Kearns, the fight manager, told some friends beforehand to send in all they had on Saxton, who, he said, couldn't lose. In New York, many fans who tried to put money on Saxton were told that they could bet only on Gavilan.'

Gavilan had earlier been involved in another questionable decision when he defended his title against Billy Graham, a popular and skilful boxer of Irish ancestry from New York's East Side, in August 1951. The match was scheduled for Madison Square Garden, and it was Gavilan's first defence of the vacant title he had won three months earlier against Johnny Bratton.

A few days before the fight, Irving Cohen, Graham's manager, got a call to visit Frankie Carbo at the bar in the Forest Hotel, a block down from the Garden. 'You want your boy to be the champ,' said Carbo. 'You give me 20 per cent and you got the title.'

Cohen, one of the most honest men in the fight business, told Carbo he could not give him 20 per cent because another manager, Pete Reilly, already had a percentage in

Graham. Carbo bent close to Cohen and said softly, 'You go and talk to Graham. He's the one who's got the final say.'

When Cohen told Graham, Billy would not hear of it. 'If I have to turn on my friend Pete Reilly, I'd rather not have the title,' he said. 'I may want to be the champ, but I don't have to be a louse to get it.' Cohen went back to Carbo and told him there was no deal, whereupon the gangster said, 'Does the kid know he's not going to win?' When Cohen said Graham knew, Carbo replied, 'He's got a lot to learn about life.'

The fight went the full 15 rounds, most of them close, though Graham always looked in front. The decision, however, went to Gavilan. Referee Mark Conn scored it seven rounds to each man, with one even, but under New York rules, if both boxers were level on rounds, the points system was brought in, and Conn gave it to Gavilan ten points to seven.

One of the two judges, Frank Forbes, had the same score on rounds but voted for Graham eleven points to ten. The second judge, Artie Schwartz, called it nine rounds for Gavilan, six for Graham, so Gavilan won the split decision and held on to his title.

The verdict caused a near riot. There was uproar and people were shouting abuse all over the famous arena. Graham stood in the centre of the ring, dumbfounded, as his supporters came out of their seats and into the aisles, waving their fists towards the ring and screaming threats at Conn and Schwartz. Police and security men kept the angry crowd from storming the ring.

Ringside reporters agreed that Graham was one of the unluckiest losers in the Garden for many years. Eddie Borden, in *Boxing and Wrestling* magazine, wrote:

During moments of the battle, Billy used his famous left jab with the precision of a piston rod, and his right-hand punch to the body was a weapon which Gavilan found difficulty in avoiding. He used it steadily throughout the fight, and the Cuban apparently had no method to