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Hank Kaplan, legendary boxing historian, passes away

HIS world was a squared circle. It was a world of blood and sweat, of stout hearts, of gallant men and heroic deeds. It was a world of heartbreak and euphoria. **Hank Kaplan** made certain that honor and dignity would cloak the men of this world and that their great actions and accomplishments would be recorded for perpetuity.

For it was his world, this squared circle, and he tended it with love and devotion. And all those who populated this world, from champion to preliminary neophyte, from promoter to spit bucket carrier, loved and adored Hank in return because no one person has done more to preserve and memorialise the oldest and most basic of sports – the common denominator of all competitions.

No one has ever researched, amassed and catalogued the history of the sport of boxing to the degree, the depth and with the personal touch that Hank has. But Hank's most salient quality was that he was not merely the guardian of the records; he was the guardian of those great champions, contenders and all those who climbed the four steps into the ring to make those records.

To Hank, flesh and blood could not be separated from paper and ink. He was friend, caretaker and advisor to so many of the greats of the sport. And in Hank's mind, any participant in the sport was 'one of the greats'.

Hank was able to understand and appreciate courage because he was as tough and courageous as any of the

Photo: Fightwire Images/Jeff Julian



DEVOTION: Hank loved boxing

great battlers whose deeds he recorded. His battles were not waged in a 20ft roped-off enclosure but in an endless open arena against a sometimes invisible, always deadly opponent, restricted neither by rules of convention nor decency. During World War II, in the US Coast Guard and for another 30 years working for the Centers for Disease Control, Hank waged war against man's ultimate enemy, the microbe, and fought disease and pestilence wherever it broke out, always with the realisation that his life was on the line.

Hank's all-consuming love affair with boxing began as a youngster growing up in Manhattan's Hebrew Orphan Asylum and grew and flourished when he was

stationed in Miami with the Coast Guard. It was here that he met Chris and Angelo Dundee, began collecting boxing memorabilia and started the *Boxing Digest* magazine. Over the years he served as consultant for films, documentaries, magazines and books, any form of media with a boxing story.

In 2006 he was accorded the highest of honours by being elected into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

What impressed everyone who knew Hank was that it was never about "What can boxing do for me?" but rather, through his actions, it was always and only what he could do to help and enhance the sport and its participants.

I cherish those memories of the many afternoons and evenings Hank and I would spend in a Cuban restaurant with Beau Jack and Kid Gavilan, with Hank lovingly cutting the Kid's Palomillo steak into bite-size pieces for him.

I can't suppress a teary chuckle visualising Hank trying to get a tie around the neck of a squirming Beau before a boxing function in Atlantic City, with a smartly attired Gavilan in the background, musing, "I don't know ... I dress myself." Hank Kaplan was always the shepherd tending his flock.

On December 14 in the early hours of the morning, the shepherd, at the age of 88 and after a brief illness, decided it was time to return to his flock.

Hank is survived by a daughter, Barbara Haar-Kaplan, a son Steve, sister Ada and brother Ted.

RON ROSS