

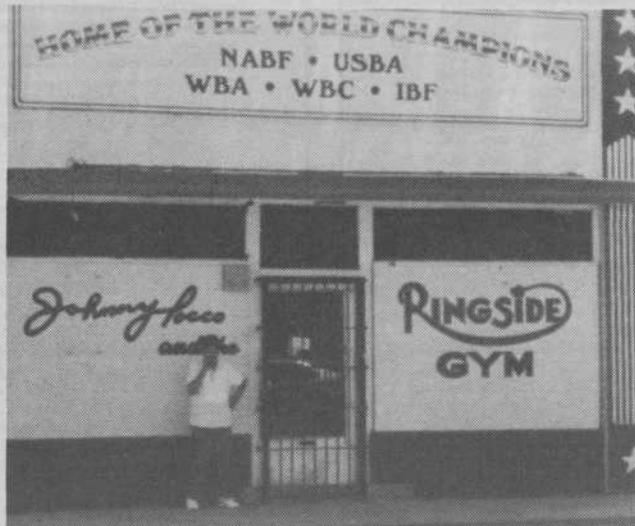
SPEAKING OF BOXING LEGENDS, JOHNNY TOCCO REMAINS RINGSIDE

W.G. Ramirez

When you speak about legends in the sport of boxing, names such as Jack Dempsey, Muhammad Ali, Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson and many others usually frequent the conversation. Before you get to the legends that were involved with the sport outside the ring, you can ramble through many, many great boxers.

However one name that sits atop the list of legends, and remains a staple in the boxing world isn't exactly a figure you'll find fighting in the ring. He isn't lacing up the gloves and slapping the leather around, no he is quietly maintaining the world's most popular gym in which boxers hone their skills en route to championship bouts.

Johnny Tocco has been involved with the sport since 1918, when he was just a waterboy at the age of eight. Now, 76 years later, Tocco remains in the business and continues to watch champions breeze in-and-out of his Ringside Gym. More times than not though, Tocco will enjoy watching his gym fill up with



The outside of the Ringside Gym says it all - "Home Of World Champions"

he does do, is immediately get a mental bio of the fighter; height, weight, age, etc. Then Tocco delivers his jab. He tells the caller about a small card at a downtown casino, when it will take place, and how to go about getting his boxer on the card. "Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang."

Tocco is frequently contacted by boxing greats such as Larry Holmes and Willie Pep, as his concern remain their's, and they always let him know that. Recently Holmes inquired about the gym's needs and Tocco mentioned the canvas that is currently on the ring, which Holmes sent him years ago, could use a replacement. Before Tocco



While young aspiring boxers spar inside the ring at Ringside Gym, history surrounds them in the form of posters which are plastered on the walls of the landmark.

get out of the ring, they follow 'em all the way back to the elevator.

"All of them seem very happy to do this, but down deep in their mind they wish they could get away and concentrate on what they have to do the night of a fight."

The setting is quite dreary. The front door may be on Charleston, but the daily entrance is in a small alley in the back. After

"I've had a great relationship with Larry Holmes...There's got to be something that I've done in my life that champions like this have never forgotten me...I can be feeling bad all day, but when I get inside that arena where the fighters are, and start talking with them, (all stress) leaves me."

Johnny Tocco

prepare with sparring partners. Aside from Johnny's daily cigars, the odor that has set in at Ringside is more than just blood, sweat and tears. It is a smell that has turned boxers into contenders; contenders into champions; and champions into legends.

If you corner Tocco into answering a question that relates to the history of his gym, there isn't any bragging or boasting in his growling voice. Actually, you may catch Tocco's eyes puddle a drop or two as he explains exactly what it means to be a part of Johnny Tocco's Ringside Gym.

"History. A legend," describes Leroy Owens, a local fighter that frequently spars with champions that train at Ringside. "When I first came in '89, this is the first place I came and I've always came back. It's the only place I'll be. There is a lot of famous fighters that come here because of Johnny Tocco."

As Tocco gives a tour of his landmark, the phone rings off the hook. One caller wants to know when the gym will be open. Another wants to know when Vinny Pazienza will be training throughout the week.

Pazienza used Tocco's gym to prepare for his fight last Saturday, in which he beat Roberto Duran.

Then Tocco receives a call from the midwest. Someone is interested in sending a fighter into Las Vegas for a small card, and he just figured Ringside would be the place to call. Tocco doesn't rush off the phone. What

could finish, Holmes told him a new one would be sent out immediately.

"He always sends me things for the gym, I've had a great relationship with Larry Holmes. I talked to Willie Pep the other day. He said he doubts he can make it out here, him and his wife, (for my birthday).

"There's got to be something that I've done in my life that champions like this have never forgotten me.

"Boxing has been my life," says Tocco. "I can be feeling bad all day, but when I get inside that arena where the fighters are, and start talking with them, (all stress) leaves me."

If it is the gym that is keeping Tocco going, we'll be seeing much more of him, as he enjoys

nothing more than to dwell at Ringside.

"(People) ask me 'when do you actually feel that you're gonna give up? And I tell 'em all the same thing, 'I'm God's servant on this earth, and the day he puts his hand on my shoulder and says 'Johnny let's take that long walk,' whether it be in the ring or in the gym, that's the way its gonna be, I'm not gonna back off," says Tocco.



Tocco is never too busy to lend a helping hand to young fighters.



PHOTO: Savoy/LVSV

Just as he is showing to Sentinel-Voice Sports Editor Willie Ramirez, Tocco's "Wall of Fame" is a full of more history than the sport itself.

young, hungry up-and-coming fighters.

As Tocco celebrates his 84th birthday this Friday, his landmark gym will be 41-years old in September, and it hasn't missed a beat yet. "There is an incentive here for them," says Tocco of his sweltering dwelling for pugs. "None of these boxers can truthfully say they like to go to the hotel that they're fighting (at). If the air conditioning is on, it's too cool for them. They've got everybody watching them, when they get out of the elevators they got people waiting for them to take pictures or sign an autograph. They follow them all the way to the ring. When they

weaving through the back, you'll find a small workout room with weights, pull-up bars and just enough room to shadow box. In the next room you'll really begin to feel the history of Ringside. Plastered across the walls are autographed photos, news clippings, old posters, and just about the best boxing memorabilia you could ever imagine. It is in this room that Tocco has his heavy bags, some workout equipment and the speed-bag. The final stop is where there probably has been more champions than any other place - Tocco's ring. Surrounded by true legendary posters of classic title fights, is where fighters mentally and physically

The entire staff of The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice would like to extend a very Happy 84th Birthday to Mr. Johnny Tocco

1460 Sports

AM 1460 WENG - LAS VEGAS YOUR SPORTS AND CNN CONNECTION

THIS WEEK'S STARTING LINEUP

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★	
Friday July 1	Monday July 4
Chicago Cubs at Houston - 5:05 p.m.	Colorado at Chicago Cubs (Dblhdr.) Gm. 1 - 10:05 p.m.
New York Mets at San Diego - (joined in progress)	Philadelphia at San Diego - 6:05 p.m.
Saturday July 2	Tuesday July 5
Montreal at S.F. Giants- 1:05 p.m.	Colorado at Chicago Cubs - 5:05 p.m.
Milwaukee at Chicago White Sox - 4:05 p.m.	Philadelphia at San Diego - (joined in progress)
New York Mets at San Diego - 7:05 p.m.	Wednesday July 6
Sunday July 3	Colorado at Chicago Cubs - 11:20 a.m.
Chicago Cubs at Houston - 11:35 p.m.	Philadelphia at San Diego - (joined in progress)
New York Mets at San Diego - (joined in progress)	Thursday July 7
Minnesota at Cleveland - 5:05 p.m.	Houston at Chicago Cubs - 5:05 p.m.
	Montreal at San Diego - (joined in progress)