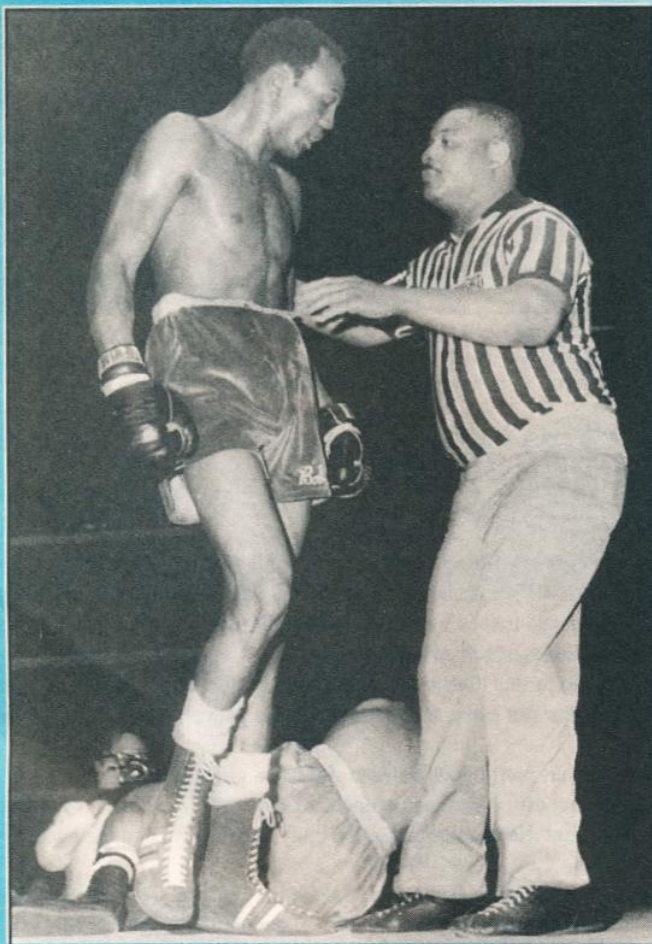


PROSPECTS FOR THE MONTH						
NAMES	Pro Debut	Total Bouts	Won	Lost	Draws	KO's
HEAVYWEIGHT						
Alvin Lewis Detroit, Mich.	6/66	8	8	0	0	6
LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT						
Mark Tessman Houston, Texas	4/66	8	8	0	0	3
MIDDLEWEIGHT						
Al Benoit Oakham, Mass.	12/66	6	6	0	0	3
WELTERWEIGHT						
Billy Wallace Randolph, Mass.	12/66	4	4	0	0	0
LIGHTWEIGHT						
Ron Harris Baltimore, Md.	5/65	6	5	0	1	1
FEATHERWEIGHT						
Jimmy Anderson England	1/65	11	11	0	0	7
BANTAMWEIGHT						
Abel Benitez Los Angeles, Cal.	11/66	5	5	0	0	1
FLYWEIGHT						
George Hind Scotland	12/65	9	9	0	0	3

In the May 1967 issue of THE RING, Tessman's potential was acknowledged. Less than a year later, he was ranked in the top 10. The Texan went unbeaten through his first 23 bouts, then lost a rematch to Henry Hank.



Tessman's sole shot at the world title ended at the feet of champion Bob Foster. Tessman fought well until getting caught by Sheriff Bob in round 10.

MARK TESSMAN:

THE SMARTEST LIGHT HEAVY IN THE WORLD

... Until That 10th Round With Foster

By Pete Ehrmann

At 18, he was hailed as one of the classiest boxers to come along since Tommy Loughran.

At 25, he was washed-up and gone from the ring for good. Getting smacked by Bob Foster could do that to even a natural like Mark Tessman.

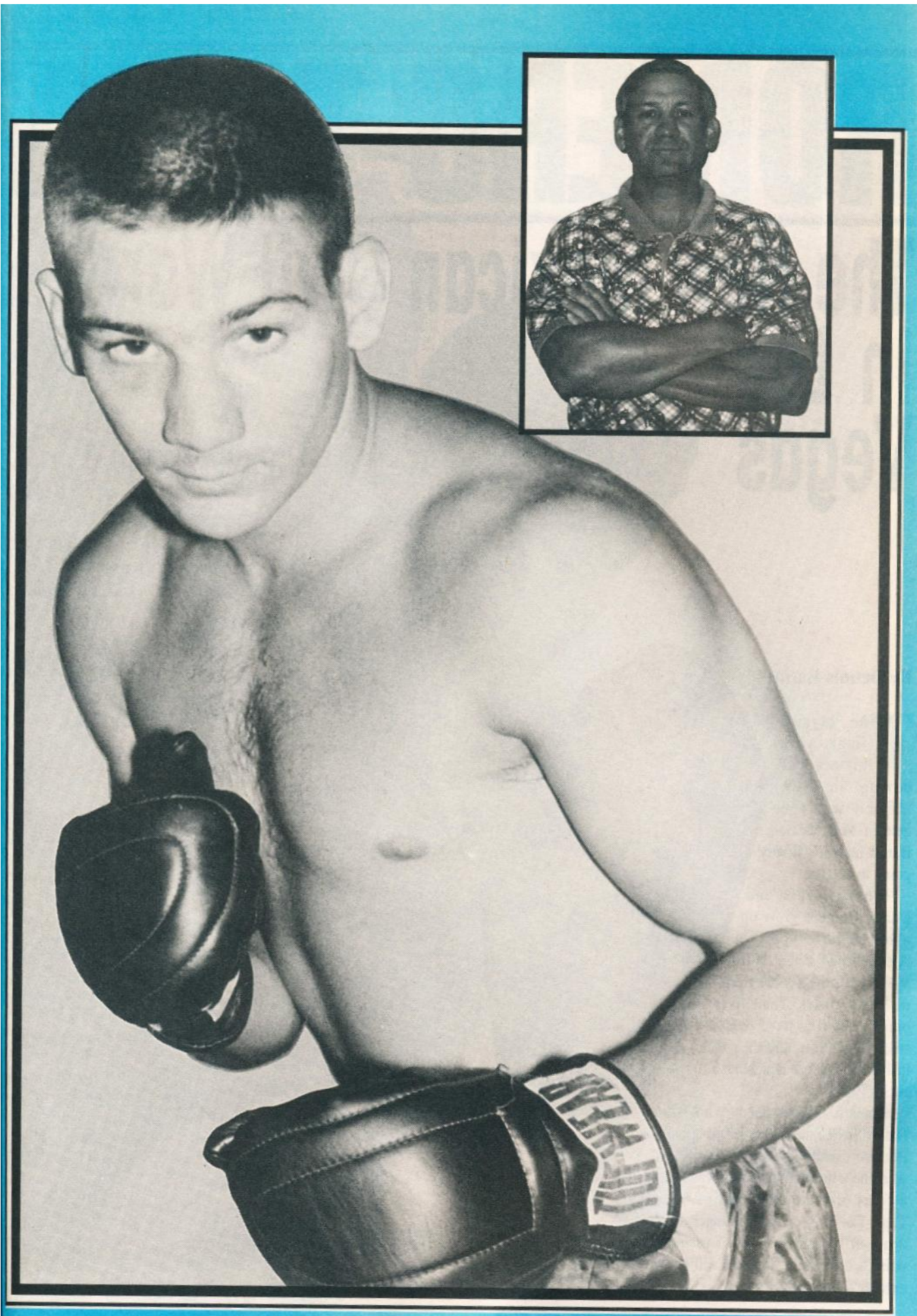
Now only 49, Tessman still qualifies as comeback material under the new parameters established by George Foreman and other creaky oldsters from his era who are still in there swinging. But the only Seniors Tour the former 175-pound contender is interested in is the one on which golf balls, not goofballs, are hit.

As it was, the native of Houston got into boxing before he was even a teenager only because he was afflicted with asthma, and his father thought that training would increase his endurance. So after putting in a full day at the Hughes Tool Company, the elder Tessman would take his son, then only 125 pounds, on the 44-mile round trip to the gym.

What happened, of course, is an old and familiar story. "It's kind of addictive," Tessman says, "once you get over getting your feet wet. I had quick hands, and I started hitting people on the chin and they went down."

Before he was old enough to drive, Tessman was too good for the other kids at that first gym, and so he trans-

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Mark Tessman

(Continued from page 51)

ferred to the Adams & Benbow Gym in downtown Houston, which, in the mid-'60s, was the home of one of the best collections of prize fighters under one roof. Many were there because they'd answered an ad placed regularly in *THE RING* by multimillionaire oilman and gym owner Hugh Benbow, who hoped to recruit a future heavyweight champion or two.

But the Big Kahuna at the A&B Gym was contender Cleveland "Big Cat" Williams, one of the most devastating heavyweight punchers of the last four decades. Williams, recalls Tessman, was "a hell of a nice guy. He had quick hands and could pull the trigger on you quick. He was a smart fighter, but I don't think life gave him some good breaks."

By the time Tessman turned pro in 1966, after winning two Lone Star Golden Gloves light heavyweight titles, he was the most heralded young prospect in the state. At 5'10", he had exceptional boxing ability, speed, and balance.

"They used to say I could carry a glass of water on my head in the ring and never spill a drop," he recalls.

Tessman was such a talented boxer that when Williams went into training for what would be his losing fight against Muhammad Ali for the world heavyweight title late that year, the crewcut neophyte was recruited to spar with him. One day the media were out in force to watch the workout, and the glare of the spotlight emboldened the youngster to "show them a little something." He realized that was probably a mistake, Tessman says, when "all of a sudden the breeze started picking up with Williams' punches."

But before any damage was done, trainer Perry Payne yanked Tessman out of the ring, telling him, "I saved your life."

Tessman was 8-0 (3) when *THE RING* selected him as its 175-pound "Prospect Of The Month" in May 1967. In less than a year, Tessman broke into "The Bible Of Boxing's" light heavyweight rankings after whipping some good fighters with loads more experience.

"In beating Tony Montano," wrote *THE RING* correspondent Harlan Haas, "Mark Tessman exhibited his paint-brush left, his clever footwork, his fast combinations, and fine physical condition. He pitched another shutout. Montano tried every trick in the book, but Tessman's speed bewildered the veteran."

By December 1968, the *Houstonian* was the fourth-ranked light heavyweight in the world on the strength of his easy decision win over dangerous veteran Henry Hank, whom Tessman recollects as "a devastating puncher who'd take you out with one shot. And he was willing to take some shots to get one of his in."

"Hank, a 15-year pro veteran, has been in with all the top men of the light heavy class and more than held his own with them," reported *Boxing Illustrated*. "He figured to give Mark a real test and did his best, but Tessman was just too fast and too good a boxer for the slow-footed Hank to catch up."

In a December 1968 rematch in Indianapolis, "I was doing quite well when I caught a right hand that opened a gash over my eye," Tessman says. "You could see my eyeball. My corner stopped the fight."

It was his first loss in 24 bouts, but in a rubber match six months later, the Texan once again boxed his way to a decision win over Hank.

Meanwhile, Tessman was also out-slicking heavyweights like Cookie Wallace, and enjoying it even more than his mastery over opponents his own size. "Those guys were a lot slower," he recalls. "They couldn't even see me."

By the end of 1969, Tessman had moved into the third spot in the world rankings and scored high in balloting for *THE RING*'s "Progress Award," given annually to the boxer who'd "achieved the greatest success and advancement, to a rated position from a lower echelon, within the last 12 months of steady and important competition."

By then, Tessman's report card read 30-1, which was top-notch for any fighter, much less a kid who, all the while he was cracking heads in the ring, was also cracking the books full-time at the University of Houston.

The next year was going to be a big one for him on both fronts. Tessman was scheduled to receive his Bachelor of Arts degree in Physical Education, and he also signed to fight for the undisputed 175-pound title on June 27.

In the meantime, Tessman was supposed to meet former world heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson in a bout on the U of H campus. But it was postponed twice and eventually canceled, leaving him heading into his title fight not having fought anywhere but the gym in more than six months. A hindrance anytime, ring rust was a real albatross going up against a champion who had knocked out 34 of the 40 men he had beaten, and all 10 of the men he'd faced since winning the light heavyweight title from Dick Tiger two years earlier.

Bob Foster would go down as one of the best light heavyweight champions in history, but in the early going of their fight in Baltimore, Tessman more than held his own.

"I don't think Bob was taking me too seriously," he says. "I started making him miss. The first thing that happens when a puncher starts missing is he gets mad and tired. The more you make 'em miss, the more you have him in hand."

It was a strategy that took Tessman into the later rounds in excellent shape. So much so, in fact, that trainer Joey Fariello, imported to Tessman's corner for the occasion, began telling him, "He's ripe. He's ready to go," and urging him to make it happen by abandoning the stick-and-move plan that had gotten him that far.

Against his own better judgment, recalls Tessman, "I started believing him. I started planting my feet and punching."

Wrote *THE RING*, "At the start of the 10th, Tessman looked like a new man. He scored with left jabs at will and right hands to the body and head. Bob moved slowly, throwing weak left jabs. Then lightning struck. As Tessman moved in, he was caught with a straight right to the head and a vicious left hook, which sent him down for the full count at two minutes of the 10th round."

Says Tessman now, "The left hook I didn't see. It was the only knockdown of my career. I always told myself to try and spot familiar faces around ringside and I'd know I was all right. There was no finger count. I got up at what I thought was eight, but the referee thought it was 10. Not that I could have continued. I probably would've gotten hurt."

The result notwithstanding, *THE RING* predicted the young Texan "may someday be champion when Foster steps down." But instead, Tessman stayed out of boxing for a year. "There were some things money-wise that upset me," he explains. He got his college degree and became a teacher at Grady Elementary School in Houston.

When he returned, the idea was to get Foster again. But in his first comeback match, Tessman lost a decision to trial-horse Eddie "Red Top" Owens, looking and feeling so bad, he says, that "I was hoping he would take me out." He was so uncharacteristically awful that afterward Tessman's dad suggested getting the contents of his water bottle tested for drugs.

His next time out, Tessman fought contender Pierre Fourie (who would lose twice in title fights to Foster) in the latter's hometown of Johannesburg, South Africa. "It was a great experience to go overseas," says Tessman, "but it was weird." He recalls a prefight meeting with a South African boxing commissioner at which Tessman, fretting about a hometown decision, said, "Look, I'm not looking for special treatment, but if I win, I win. If I lose, I'll shake your hand."

"Fine," the commissioner told him.

Still, the American was wary, and having the same commissioner as referee of the bout didn't help much.

"Fourie came out and tried to outbox me," Tessman recalls. "I got him on the ropes and the referee pulled me off. After three, four rounds, he started using his head, thumbs, and laces, and the ref wasn't doing anything about it. So I got in there toe-to-toe. I lost a split decision. They said it was one of the best fights they'd ever seen."

And it was Tessman's last, at age 25.

His trainer, Charley Court, advised him that it would be at least two years before he could get another title shot. "And there was no sense staying in boxing with a college education," says Tessman, who by then was teaching and coaching high school football, a profession he loved and remained in for six years, until family requirements forced him to seek better-paying work. For the last nine years, he has been a manufacturing representative in Houston for Capitol Cement.

In this age when hardly anybody retires from boxing for good, it's hard to imagine a boxer as talented as Tessman sticking to his goodbyes at such a young age.

"I was tempted to come back," he admits. "I got divorced, and of course divorce can cause all kinds of emotions, and can cause you to go off the deep end." But when he told Court he was thinking of fighting again, the man Tessman says "is not your typical trainer" told him: "Then you do it without me. We had a deal." The deal stuck.

In the early-'80s, Tessman did appear in the ring again, but this time as a referee. It was a short-lived and disappointing avocation.

"Refereeing has become quite political, with all the alphabet groups and everything," he says. "If you don't know anybody in the WBA or WBC or whatever, they'll get their own people right there in your own hometown."

A better experience was shared with the legendary Jackie McCoy: training Canadian heavyweight hopeful Willie deWit.

"I had never trained anybody when I got the call asking if I would," he says. "I left a heck of a job and trained Willie for two years, from 1984-'86. It was a wonderful experience, and I was just so glad to be in that situation." (DeWit never fought for a world title. He compiled a record of 20-1-1, then left the ring for a career in law.)

Overall, says the former wunderkind, "I wouldn't change anything I did. I met some fine people in boxing. I met some questionable people, too, but you're gonna find that in any business."

Tessman does puzzle over one thing, though. A year ago, he had open heart surgery to replace an aortic heart valve that doctors said probably had been defective since birth. But during his prefight physicals, the doctors said it was just a murmur and let it go.

"I don't know," says Tessman, "how I made it through all those fights."

The answer, of course, is the boxer's traditional way of using his head more than his heart. Until that 10th round against Foster, anyway. ■

Pete Ehrmann, a frequent contributor to The Ring, is based in West Allis, Wisconsin.



MARK TESSMAN

Born: November 18, 1946 in Houston, Texas to Paul and Lucille Tessman.

Died: November 22, 2016 in Houston, Texas.

The Ring
September 1997