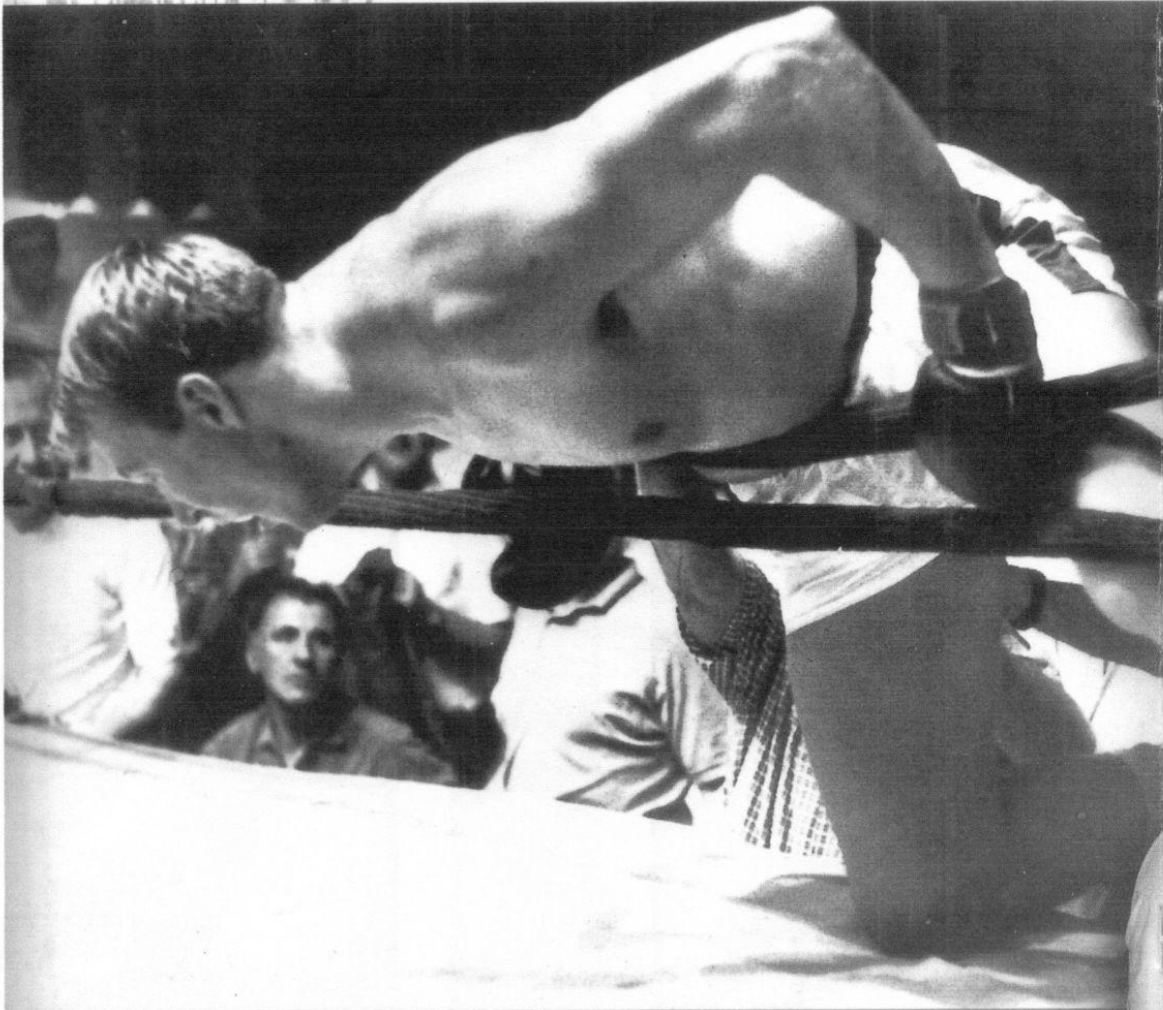


THE ALHAMBRA



Olympic shot put champion (1960) Bill Neider finds the uphill climb too hard and he is stopped in one round by Jim Wiley at the Alhambra on May 15, 1961.

Joey Giardello was the most famous alumnus of the original Alhambra. He beat Canadian Wilfie Greaves there in 1961.

From the program of the initial show at the "New Alhambra" Friday, May 4, 2004-Omar Sheika vs. E.T. Whitaker in Main Event.

ALHAMBRA:

A Brief History



Bill Neider won the Gold Medal for the USA in the shot put competition at the 1960 Olympics in Rome. He was the world record holder in that event. But he wanted to be a professional fighter.

Big mistake!

A group of guys formed a corporation, paid Neider a weekly salary of \$200 and asked ex-heavyweight champion Jersey Joe Walcott to help out by

training Neider when he came east from Santa Monica, CA.

Neider's "coming out" party was scheduled for May 15, 1961, at the Alhambra, an old movie theatre at the corner of 12th and Morris Streets where Passyunk Avenue intersects in South Philadelphia.

Sports Illustrated dispatched its boxing writer, Gilbert Rogin, to cover the action.

Middleweight contender Joey Giardello, loser of three straight fights and riding on a one-way ticket to Palooka-ville, topped the

card against Canadian Wilfie Greaves, but the big news was Neider's pro debut.

Not for long!

Jim Wiley, a "pants presser" who had lost four of his five recorded pro fights—three by knockout—knocked Neider out of the ring after two minutes of action. Fans tried to assist Neider, but the count had reached 10 by the time he got back into the ring.

"When you throw an iron ball, it doesn't come back at you," lamented Neider. "I felt out of place, like a lost puppet, you know."

It didn't seem to matter that night, but Giardello's ninth-round knockout of Greaves jump-started Joey on his way to the world middleweight title, which he won more than two years later by beating Dick Tiger in Atlantic City.

The standing-room crowd of 1,630 was the largest to watch boxing in the brief, but storied history of the Alhambra, where boxing was a constant from the fall of 1959 until the spring of 1962. Jimmy Riggio, who owned the Passyunk Gym and had promoted at the Plaza, Broad & Porter, in the early 1950s, promoted all but one of the cards at the Alhambra.

The dictionary defines Alhambra as a "...citadel of the Moorish kings near Granada, Spain, built during the 13th and 14th cent(ur)ies." The Alhambra in South Philadelphia was not quite that old. It sported pink-painted walls, and you could see cutouts of hearts and cupid-like figures along those walls.

Besides Giardello, other top locals

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ALHAMBRA

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who boxed there included Stanley "Kitten" Hayward, Leotis Martin, Charley Scott, Jesse Smith, Jimmy Beecham, Dick Turner, Joe Rowan. All were world-rated during their careers.

Top visitors were Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Kenny Lane, Arthur Persley and a pair of future world junior welterweight champions, Eddie Perkins and Carlos Hernandez.

Perkins arrived from Chicago to box local prospect Carl Hubbard on opening night, Sept. 25, 1959. He lost a 10-round decision and his legs buckled under him as he was being assisted from the ring. Perkins was taken semi-conscious in a police emergency wagon to St. Agnes Hospital. He recovered and went to have a Hall of Fame career, despite what the myopic voting committee says at Canastota, NY.

Jimmy Soo, a popular lightweight from Grays Ferry who was part Chinese, part Irish, brought in solid crowds at the Alhambra. Prior to the Giardello-Greaves card, Soo defeated Ray Lancaster before 1,310 fans. Later that season, 1,585 watched him stop Fairmount rival Bobby Douglas. Soo's fans at ringside donned Chinese coolie hats.

Prelim fights sometimes stole the show.

"He Called Me a Dirty Bricklayer," yelled the headline in Jack McKinney's Daily News story the day of the grudge match—in a

prelim—between Basil "Turk" Brocco and Frank "Sonny" DeVuono. Brocco was the bricklayer. DeVuono was a young fruit merchant from the Italian Market on 9th Street. Dick Turner outpointed Gaylord Barnes in the windup, but fights broke out in the audience when DeVuono won by K0 in the second round of the preliminary match. Chairs were overturned and the ring lights went out.

There had been trouble at an earlier show when Carlos Hernandez, of Venezuela, was awarded the decision after 10 hard rounds with Jethro Cason, of North Philadelphia. Chairs and bottles were tossed before the Police restored order.

In the fall of 1961, the Blue Horizon began staging fight cards on North Broad Street. By the spring of 1962, Riggio left the Alhambra to try his hand at bigger fights in bigger buildings. His biggest was Giardello's middleweight title defense over "Hurricane" Carter in the winter of 1964 at Convention Hall in West Philadelphia. It was a match between two Alhambra alumni.

Jimmy Toppi, who owned the Alhambra, sold the building to the city after Riggio left. The city turned it into a parking lot. Like the Joni Mitchell song, "they paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

The building you are in was once known as Viking Hall. It has been renamed the New Alhambra Sports & Entertainment Center in honor of South Philadelphia's last regularly running small fight club. We are confident its future will surpass its past.

Compiled by Chuck Hasson

Junior welterweight champion Eddie Perkins should be in the Hall of Fame, but he lost in his 1959 appearance at the Alhambra.

