

ATTILIO "ROCKY" CASTELLANI

By Jim Amato



He may have been one of the best middleweights to never hold a title. He was a ranked contender for almost a decade but he received only one title shot. That was fairly late in his fine career. He fought in the days when there were only eight weight divisions with ONE champion per division. By today's standards Attilio "Rocky" Castellani would have easily won a piece of a title.

Rocky was born on May 28, 1927 in Luzerne, Pennsylvania. He would die in the same town 81 years later. Rocky made his professional debut on February 14, 1944 fighting to a six round draw. He would lose his next two fights by knockout. It's very hard to believe at this point that Rocky would one day become a top contender. He was tenacious though and he soon began to win more than he lost. He was stopped in four rounds by Billy Kilroy in 1946. He would only be halted one more time in his career and that was not until 1952. In

fact Rocky was only defeated by kayo only four times in 83 career battles. Seeing the competition he faced, that is quite amazing!

Rocky beat Kilroy in a 1947 rematch and then he made his Madison Square Garden debut against rugged Lenny "Boom Boom" Mancini. The father of Ray Mancini was a pretty tough guy himself. Rocky won a decision in this fight. He would defeat Lenny again later in the year. 1948 was a good year for Rocky as he moved steadily up the ladder with wins over Harold Green, Herbie Kronowitz and a clever boxer out of Niles, Ohio named Sonny Horne.



Rocky, left en route to decision over tough Ernie Durando.

In 1949 Rocky lost a decision to Charley Fusari at the Garden. Later though he would defeat the slick Tony Janiro in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Back at the Garden Castellani lost to the great Kid Gavilan. Rocky would then put together a ten fight win streak that would carry him into 1952 and establish him as a fighter to be contended with. Among his victims were Harold Green, Ernie Durando, Gene "Silent" Hairston and a rough fellow named Joey Giardello. In 1952 Rocky lost a controversial stoppage to Durando. He quickly regrouped to defeat Ralph "Tiger" Jones. He drew with the outstanding Billy Graham and he defeated another top notch guy in Johnny Bratton. As you can see Rocky ran in fast company.

In December of 1952 Rocky made his debut at the famous but now long gone Cleveland Arena. Rocky would become quite popular there. That night he defeated a good fighter named Jimmy Flood. In 1953 Rocky would again defeat Tiger Jones. He would split a pair of verdicts with highly regarded Pierre Langlois. He then stopped a gutsy Clevelander named Jackie Keough. Rocky finished the year with a big win over Philly's Gil Turner.



Bobo Olson drops Rocky in the 12th round of their title fight.

In 1954 Rocky would win a one sided decision over Durando. That set the stage for August 20th at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Rocky would face Carl "Bobo" Olson for the middleweight championship of the world. At this point Rocky had been a pro for a decade and a top contender for a half dozen years. The fight with Olson was well contested. Bobo was a very good fighter and he is in the International Boxing Hall Of Fame. Rocky gave a good account of himself. He had Bobo down in the eleventh. Rocky was down in the twelfth. In the end Olson retained his title with a few points to spare.

In 1955 Rocky took on the legendary Sugar Ray Robinson. Ray was on the comeback trail and the winner of this fight would probably get another crack at the title. It was a very close fight Rocky floored Ray in the sixth round and had him hurt. Robinson survived and won a controversial split decision. Again Rocky was on the outside looking in. In 1956 at the Cleveland Arena Rocky took on Gene Fullmer. The bull like Fullmer took the early rounds as his strength and awkward style had Rocky on the defensive. By the middle rounds though Rocky had figured Gene out and was putting on a counter punching clinic. Still in the judges eyes it was not enough and again Rocky was on the short end of a split decision.



Rocky and Joey Giambra mix it up.

From this point Rocky's career began to wind down. He was still a viable contender but there were two losses to Joey Giambra. In 1957 Rocky lost to Bobby Boyd and Rory Calhoun and he decided to hang up the gloves. He put together a sterling record of 65-14-4 facing the cream of the crop. He was a fan favorite at the Garden, the Cleveland Arena and in Scranton. As a fan you knew, when Rocky Castellani stepped into the ring, you were going to get your money's worth. Rocky would become a popular and highly respected fight judge.

I would like to thank Rocky's son David and the rest of the Castellani family for sharing information and photos of Rocky. He was loved and respected by his family, friends and the sport of boxing.