

PETE_SARMIENTO

by
Tan Wee Eng

"I forgot to duck" has always been the answer 84-year-young Pete Sarmiento has to offer whenever he was asked about his only first round knockout he suffered in all his some 300 battles in the ring. Yes, Tony Canzoneri koed Sarmiento in the first round on August 17, 1927 in Brooklyn.

According to Sarmiento, he was a trouble-maker and got mad easily. Anyone who got into his path as he put it, "I fight and punch them in the street or some place." No amateur fights in the Philippines prior to 1920, but lots and lots of street fights. One has got to be tough and good with his fists.

In 1918 he worked as a streetcar conductor in Manila. After work he would go to the gymnasium daily for a workout with good fighters. "Simply because I like to fight," as he put it.

One day a man approached him and asked if he would like to fight in the Olympic Stadium. Pete jumped at the offer. A four-rounder. How he enjoyed throwing punches all over his opponent. Non-stop action. Boring in aggressively (I've always believed Sarmiento and Henry Armstrong fought in somewhat similar style), no backing up, throughout the four rounds.

Instantly he won the approval of the crowd and became a drawing card after that bout. The press called him "Typhoon" and "Pinwheel". Sarmiento was on the way into the boxing world.

Because fighting was in his blood and he had a flying start, he quit his streetcar conductor job. He was so good that after only a few preliminary fights, he became a main eventer and had always been one thereafter.

Sarmiento had no proper records or clippings but according to press reporters, he had over 300 fights in 12 years starting in 1920. He used to work out with Dencio Cabanela in Manila and had the greatest respect for him. "The greatest Filipino fighter" he said. (You will remember Dencio died in Australia after fighting Bert McCarthy in Melbourne on July 2, 1921. His other wars Down Under were against Eugene Criqui, Joe Symonds and Sid Godfrey. Incidentally, Dencio was in the trio of Filipino boxing greats who died outside of their homeland in the 1920's, the other being Pancho Villa, who succumbed to blood poisoning after his bout with Jimmy McLarnin on July 4, 1925 in Oakland, California, and Clever Sencio, who was found dead in his hotel room after his bout against Bud Taylor on April 19, 1926 in Milwaukee.)

He felt elated remembering he beat Australia's pride George Mendies and Syd Keenan in Manila in 1921 and 1922. As a bantamweight he challenged Macario Villon for the latter's featherweight title. As Pete said, "He no take me because I used to give him good workout in the gym. Maybe I could beat him in the fight." (Incidentally, Macario Villon later invaded Australia and fought Billy Grime, etc).

He was having trouble getting fights now. Had to take on heavier opponents. He challenged the Irishman, Jerry Monahan, lightweight Orient champ, who was in the U.S. Army. He said that was hell of a fight for him. He lost after 12 hectic rounds and suffered a first round knockdown. After that he lost to the Orient featherweight king, Terry Pandong in another battle royal. (Pandong later also fought in the U.S.).

PETE SARMIENTO

(continued)

He lost to the immortal Pancho Villa for the bantamweight Orient title over 15 gruelling rounds earlier that year. Pancho was flyweight Orient champion and so Sarmiento, the holder of the Orient bantamweight crown lost it in great sportsmanship style. The fight was sold-out and was held in the Olympic Stadium (did ya know that it was the brainchild of Frank Churchill ... I'd call him the George Washington of Boxing in the Philippines ... who together with Eddie Tait - his business partner and who fought as Young Burns in Philippines - organised the Olympic Club in 1910. The Olympic Stadium was built by them. Churchill was the first to manage Filipino boxers on Uncle Sam's shores and managed Pancho Villa, Pete Sarmiento, Lope Tenorio, Ignacio Fernandez, Speedy Dado, etc. I used to spend all my young schooldays pocket money at the CHURCHILL & TAIT Manila Shows - open air amusement carnival with caterpillar rides, merry-go-rounds, flying-wheel rides, hula-hula dances, dare-devil globe motor cycle stunts, rodeo and gun-shooting acts (that's where I got to know GUNBOAT JACK, that great Negro from U.S. who fought all over the world and whose repertoire as a showman could not be surpassed in his heyday).

Back to Sarmiento. He said Pancho was too good - very fast and strong for a flyweight. Pancho knocked him down several times in that most gruelling, hectic fight. Pancho told Pete after the battle royal, "You are the only one who gave me a blue-black eye." Sarmiento answered: "I got one too."

Pete said it was his last fight in his homeland (Pancho's). Villa sailed for the U.S. a few days later. (Did ya know that both Pancho Villa and my pal, Ignacio Fernandez had the same opponent in both their first fights on Uncle Sam's shores?

- June 7, 1922 - Pancho Villa ND 12 Abe Attel Goldstein, Jersey City
- June 24, 1927 - Ignacio Fernandez KO 7 Abe Attel Goldstein, Chicago

Yes, Sarmiento also mentioned Pancho Villa apart from Dencio Cabanela - in his opinion these two were the very best and greatest Filipino fighters!

He remembered his last fight in the Philippines. He koed Joe Suzara, flyweight champion, who was challenging Pete for the latter's bantamweight title, in the tenth round of their 15 round bout on June 30, 1923. It was another full house affair at the Olympic Stadium, tickets sold out long before fight took place. Joe Suzara was a stablemate of Macario Villon.

(In "The Ring", ?month, 1923 I quote - "Pete Sarmiento successfully defended his bantam title on June 30 easily, playfully, and decisively stopping Joe Suzara, the fly champ and challenger, in ten rounds at the Olympic Stadium. Sarmiento by this achievement proved to the fans that he is a whirlwind and as clever as Pancho Villa. Sarmiento is now in the United States where he hopes to get a crack at Joe Lynch for the world's title. Although Suzara was defeated, he did not lose a chunk of his popularity with the boxing public.")

Pete said Goodbye on his retirement as a longshoreman in San Pedro, California as I quote:

-March 25, 1970 - The DISPATCHER

WILMINGTON - Veteran Local 13 longshoreman, Pete Sarmiento shown above in his fighting days, with Jack Dempsey - retired recently from the waterfront. He sent along the following message for his old friends:

PETE_SARMIENTO

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57

"I have now retired from longshoring. We had lots of fun - playing cards during lunchtime and joking on the job. I always loved to work with you wise guys. I will miss you all now.

"You call me a Dog Eater and I call you all punchy and double ugly. Because I am a handsome Filipino Clark Gable.

"I know many longshoreman like me. They voted for me to serve as Sergeant-at-Arms for two years in I.L.W.U. Local 13.

"I want to thank you all again. Now, brothers, do not get hurt on the job - work safe. God bless us all and stay well."

You too, Pete.

Pete, who celebrated his 84th birthday on Sept. 19, 1985, and his wife, Frances have six grownup children - three girls, three boys. One granddaughter got married in San Francisco in 1972. Two grandsons were in the service with the Marine Corps.



**PETE
SARMIENTO
SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

I. L. W. U. LOCAL 13
231 WEST "C" STREET
WILMINGTON, CALIFORNIA





Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

STUDIOS
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

December 30th,

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Mr. Pete Sarmiento
107 No. Palos Verdes
San Pedro, California

Dear Pete Sarmiento:

Yes, I remember you well when you were boxing under the management of Frank Churchill.

Am glad to hear you are in the shipyards as work of that nature is a highly patriotic contribution to the war effort. Am also glad to hear you are doing well.

If I get a chance, I will write something about you and the other boys who were with Frank in the big days.

Best wishes, and

Sincerely,

DR:mmm


Damon Runyon

DAMON RUNYON WAS SPORT
EDITOR OF LOS ANGELES
HERALD EXAMINER

HE WAS VERY GOOD TO ME.
VERY SORRY. HE PASSED AWAY.