

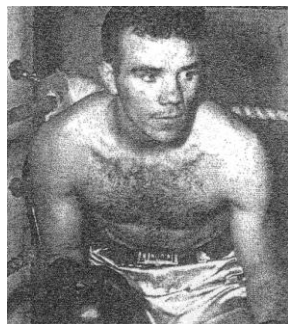
World Boxing Hall of Fame announces

“Class of 2005” . . .

AND

Glen Flanagan is coming home

By: Jake Wegner



Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Jack Dempsey, Willie Pep, Benny Leonard, Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali...**Glen Flanagan.**

When the World Boxing Hall of Fame announced its inductees for the Class of 2005 this week, it did much more than release a press statement—it liberated a spirit—a spirit of years long past—a spirit whose body walked this earth and entertained hundreds of thousands of sports fans for nearly 15 years. That spirit is our very own Featherweight sensation and ring marvel, Glen Flanagan.

Glen Flanagan was born in 1926 in St. Paul, MN. His family moved around frequently, and after a stint out west, returned to the state they knew best. Moose Lake, Blaine, and Duluth were all pit stops before finally resettling in their native St. Paul. Glen grew up hanging out at various boxing gyms in the Twin Cities, but was especially fond of the Pott’s Gymnasium in Minneapolis, where amateur star, Jackie Graves sometimes came to train—a fighter whose future battles with Flanagan would make Minnesota history. Glen joined the Navy boxing team and after tallying off an unbeaten streak of 44 consecutive victories, Flanagan turned pro and fought local Minneapolis Featherweight, and now current trainer of Jose Leo Moreno, Emmett Yanez. Flanagan pounded out a 4 round preliminary victory, knocking Yanez down in every round.

It is said that a great fight will get you talked about for years, but a *grudge fight* will get you talked about *forever*. If this is true, then Glen Flanagan will be getting press for the next five centuries, as Flanagan’s entire career was a grudge fight. His very first words to Earl Kaehn, the trainer who first put a glove on Glen, was, “I want to learn how to fight dirty,” words that are not representative of Flanagan’s overall attitude and style of boxing, but rather his intelligence of knowing that even the best fighters in the world, were often stocked with a “tool box” of skills not spoken of, but used in trench warfare. If ever a fighter was in a close one, the best knew how to lace, thumb, elbow, or headbutt to close the gap. If Glen was to be able to compete with top fighters, he knew that he must be able to defend against such tactics, *or...use them himself*. One such fight that resembled more of an alley-war than a boxing match, was Glen’s torrid and foul-filled fest with a tough local Italian by the name of Norm Mastrian. It was Irish vs. Italian in this local, ethnic, barn-burner. Both fighters wanted a shot at the state featherweight champion in Graves, and spewed their dislike for one another, both to the papers and to each other’s faces. Before a sold-out Minneapolis crowd, Glen Flanagan pounded Mastrian to the canvas a grand total of 11 times. They both fell out of the ring in the fourth round and fought alongside the ringboards before both taking an 8 count and scurrying back into the ring for more of the same. The ref finally stopped the carnage in the 7th round. In his dressing room, a lacerated and bruised Mastrian announced his retirement.

Later that same year (1948), Glen gave some mega-performances, including an exciting win over highly ranked power-puncher, Charley Riley in December. Riley was nationally ranked and known for his fearsome power. Flanagan’s own father went down to the Minnesota Boxing Commission’s office to ask them not to allow it. He feared Glen would get killed. Glen beat him easily. And while most fighters would be nursing their wounds and avoiding even roadwork, Glen took a fight against another top contender in Miguel Acevedo just two weeks later, battling to a draw. One year later, he got his long-awaited showdown with world-ranked Jackie Graves for the Minnesota Featherweight title. Graves had owned the Minnesota title since his 7th pro fight. He was also sporting a 64-4-1 record with 37 KO’s,

and had knocked out 7 of his last 10 opponents. Glen, now 35-2-6 with 18 KO's, was ready. It was a close fight, with Graves edging him out on points over 10 rounds in Minneapolis. But Glen, known for his craftiness, noticed something late in the fight that he thought he could exploit—Graves was susceptible to an educated head feint, followed by a quick right hand—of which Glen Flanagan was a master.



Flanagan keeps Graves at bay with a left jab in their first encounter in Oct. of 49'.

Having believed that he had gotten Graves' weakness calculated, and the timing down to deliver the right hand, Flanagan pushed for a quick rematch. It would prove to be a "grave" mistake for Graves. Graves was one of the hardest-hitting featherweights in ring history, and was also a skilled boxer. Not much into strategy, Graves swung for the fences and liked to challenge the laws of physics when it came to heads staying attached to his victims. His style was aggressive, and fought more on instinct and reflexes than on strategy and tact. Graves barely beat Flanagan in their first encounter, but was knocked out in the return bout one month later. The difference?...Graves stayed the same, and Flanagan got better. Flanagan developed a game plan and executed it—right on Graves' chin. The result was a third round KO victory for Flanagan. This victory, combined with a scintillating performance win over future Lightweight champion and Hall of Famer, Lauro Salas, propelled Glen into a top 10 ranking and international acclaim. *Flanagan was determined to stay.*

Glen Flanagan's fame and fan base was swelling. It was said that wherever this good-looking Irish pugilist went, women quickly powdered their noses and flashed a wide smile before nervously uttering, "Hel-lo Mr. Flanagan." Guys? They loved him and often requested autographs for "their kid". The guys that didn't like him...what were they gonna do? It's like resenting the class jock for his brawn and magnetism with the ladies. Resenting him makes you normal...voicing that opinion makes you stupid.

After Flanagan-Graves II, Glen Flanagan was a wanted man. Always a crowd-pleaser for his fearless attitude and all-out style, Flanagan was now in the big-time. He faced the undefeated Gene Smith in Madison Square Garden in April of 52'. For the younger readers who don't remember Smith, he was a nationally-ranked fighter with a 76% KO percentage. Smith knocked Glen down twice in the 5th round, but Glen's ring savvy saved him. But something happened after the second knockdown. Glen felt something run through his veins. He recognized this sensation. It was one part adrenaline, two parts Irish pride. Glen came back and dominated the remainder of the fight, but lost a split decision. The crowd booed loudly. Always one to avenge his defeats, Glen Flanagan was death in rematches. He yanked Smith back into the ring three months later and in Smith's hometown of Washington D.C.—just the way Flanagan like it. He pounded out a convincing 10 round decision. Both of the Smith fights were televised on a national scale. If you had a pulse and owned a T.V.—you saw these fights. *They were that big.*

This victory set up a shot at the interim Featherweight title, vacated by Sandy Saddler while he was in the Army. Two Irishmen...two egos...two great boxers...one helluva great fight. Collins took the 15 round decision, but Glen fought on for eight more years, entertaining thousands of fans world-wide. He also fought one more time against Jackie Graves. The result—same thing...3rd round knockout. As Glen's son Jeff has said, "Glen just had Jackie's number."

When it was all over—when the fans went home, the bruises had healed, and the smoke had cleared; a legacy had been left behind. A legacy that continues on to this day as we continue to talk about this great fighter who compiled a record of 85-23-13 with 34 KO's. A boxer who fought 3 world champions and 26 different ranked fighters for a total of 35 times (he fought some more than once). A slugger who wasn't afraid to take his show on the road and face a ranked killer in his own backyard with hand-picked

judges. A pugilist whose style and wit befuddled opponents, from which sprang memorable quotes such as Hall of Fame Lightweight champion Jimmy Carter who said while shaking his head after their clash, “Glen Flanagan is the cleverest boxer that I ever fought” (and Carter fought them all). A game scrapper who often fought opponents much heavier than him saying, “As long as the check clears, I’ll be there.” On top of all of this, Flanagan competed in the most talent-rich era in Featherweight history. His 85 wins are more than recent champions such as Manny Pacquiao and Prince Naseem Hamed combined! What’s more is the higher level of competition that Glen faced and on a more consistent basis than either Pacquiao and Hamed. *There’s something else too.* This all goes without even mentioning that this all took place back in an era of only 8 weight classes—not the 17 we have today. Surely if Flanagan, or even many of his talented opponents, would be fighting in an era of multiple belts and titles, and almost two dozen weight classes to choose from; surely Glen Flanagan would be one of the major sanctioning bodies’ champion, or even the linear undisputed champion for that matter.

In a sport where most participants either come from prison or the streets (and usually return); Glen Flanagan’s life is a shining reminder that there are glaring exceptions to the usual sad paths most boxers’ lives take. Most professional boxers stick around too long, lose their reflexes and speed, and thus end up taking exuberant amounts of punishment and KO losses at the tail ends of their careers. Most boxers, having come from nothing, also have no financial management skills, and thus end up penniless and punch-drunk. Glen possessed the intelligence and personal honesty with himself to know when to get out of the game. After drawing with Javellana Kid in April of 1960, a fight Flanagan was winning until he lost a point for a low blow (most likely intentional), Flanagan soaked his sore knuckles for the last time. He was 33.

Glen, earnings still in the bank, a nice home in the suburbs, and an Ozzie & Harriet family to boot; went into real estate and the insurance business. Applying the same dedication and acumen that made him a wily professional boxer, Flanagan made a name for himself in the community, the business world, and at home.

Sadly, while vacationing in Mexico with his family in January of 79’, Glen suffered a massive heart attack and died shortly thereafter. He was just 52. Newspapers around the world ran the story. Local columnists who followed Flanagan’s career decades earlier wrote moving and heartfelt obituaries. The boxing community took a ten count. Glen himself, had never heard one—in 121 professional fights, he was never knocked out (His loss to Danny Martin in May of 47’ was stopped due to a cut, not a punch).

How do you write an article about a legend and an icon? I don’t know...I’m sure I’ve fallen short. How do you give him his just due...his recognition? For years, his son Jeff has told anyone who would listen, how great a fighter his father was. He’d re-create the moves and show the jabs his father once delivered into opponents. He’d take on his dad’s voice and imitate a fond Glen Flanagan quote. He loves his father. He wants you to love him as well. His eyes dilate and his heartbeat accelerates, as he struggles to fit all that he can into his limited time-frame to make his case, like some young attorney in a closing argument. He’s spoken to me about Glen many times. It’s clear this is a man with a desperate love for his hero, a hero who happens to be his father. What’s also clear is the deep breath that he sighs with as he finishes his stories. The life drains from his eyes as he realizes that he’s said these things hundreds of times before. He feels like he’s spinning his wheels—that no one will remember this great fighter.

On October 22, Jeff’s role as an advocate for his father will be over; as the World Boxing Hall of Fame proudly inducts Glen Flanagan as a member of the Class of 2005. For Jeff, his quest to have his father’s name remembered and spoken of for years to come will become a reality. For Glen, he’ll take his place among the titans of the sport in boxing immortality. ***This one’s for you Glen!***

--Jake Wegner-