

By Vince Murray
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OCALA — Every once in a while, when it's quiet, Tony Alongi will daydream.

In those dreams — computer bouts of the mind — he takes on heavyweight champions and contenders past, present and future.

Like most of us in such Walter Mitty situations, Alongi almost always wins.

Unlike most of us, Alongi's gears aren't running on imagination. In the hectic sixties, Tony Alongi was a pretty darn good heavyweight — good enough to earn a Top 10 ranking.

Alongi fought hard-hitting Jerry Quarry twice, coming away all-even both times. He defeated tough Canadian champion George Chuvalo on a split decision on Miami Beach only to see the verdict changed to a draw the day after.

A quick look in the Ring Record Book will show how many world title bouts Quarry and Chuvalo had — Alongi had none.

The reasons may never be clear.

But Quarry and Chuvalo were sluggers, easy to figure out, in and out of the ring.

Alongi was a boxer-puncher — the kind of guy who could outthink you and outfight you.

But he's not bitter.

"Everything work out for the best," said Alongi, an Ocala resident for several years. "It just wasn't meant to be. I might have become rich and famous and never realized how nice it would be to have a wife and family."

"I have millions of dollars in my children. I wouldn't trade that for all the championships in the world."

Still, once in a while, he wonders.

Alongi turned professional after winning 27 straight bouts and the New Jersey Golden Gloves championship.

In 46 pro fights, he lost just twice, to Argentine Roldolfo Diaz on cuts and to contender Billy Daniels, who stopped him in five rounds in New York's Madison Square Garden.

He won 41 fights, 23 by KO, and had three draws.

But the closest he ever got to a champion was training with Muhammad Ali in Miami's Fifth Street Gym.

"I trained with Ali," said Alongi, who will be 49 in August. "He was a great fighter. People don't realize that he was an extremely strong man. He was in such fantastic condition. One time he ran seven miles to the gym — took off his running boots — and got in the ring and boxed five different guys, two, 2-minute rounds each.

"He was on top of you all the time ven though he was always moving. I did pretty good in the gym with him. But to go 15 rounds with that guy would really have been a challenge."

Alongi was close to cracking the title picture several of times.

"I lost my 29th and 31st fights," said Alongi. "Daniels stopped me in the fifth round in 1963. He went to the hospital

for a couple of days, I got the loss. It's crazy how things like that happen."

"Don Dunphy (radio/TV announcer) had just said how Tony Alongi had completely taken the play away from Billy Daniels when bango."

Alongi's first management team included Miami businessman Chuck Seriani and former heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano.

When Seriani suffered a heart attack, Alongi went back to New Jersey.

"After the second Quarry fight some people promised me all kinds of money to go out to California," said Alongi. "They were nice people. They just couldn't get me the money fights."

So Alongi hung up his gloves.

"I'd seen a lot of fighters who'd hung around too long," said Alongi. "Boxing was never the type of thing I had to do. It was fun going back to work. The hard thing was that all of a sudden you were without attention."

Like most boxers he thought about a comeback. Unlike most, he never made that mistake.

"Nobody who ever came back had the reflexes," said Alongi. "Chris Dundee wanted me to become a referee and a couple of people in Miami had boxers they wanted me to help out with but I was always too involved with my work."

"I thought about it all the time. For years I thought, what's wrong with me, always dreaming about comebacks all the time?"

Alongi realizes that boxing has helped him.

"I had a lot of fun boxing," said Alongi. "In 1962 I was on the cover of Boxing Illustrated. I was really a shy kid. It really helped me. I always look back at the kids who could have gone so wrong that boxing has helped."

"It could be better controlled. I'm for a national commission."

The draws with Chuvalo and Quarry and a cancellation against Doug Jones may have cost Alongi a title shot.

"Chuvalo went 15 rounds with Ali," said Alongi. "I beat the guy that night. The next day my jaw was too sore to eat. I went to the beach. On the way back I heard on the radio that they changed the decision to a draw. That's how I found out."

"Everybody had been congratulating me for winning the fight. I hit him with a lot of punches. He was always right there in front of you. He'd hit you anywhere. I even had a big bruise on my thigh the next morning."

"The first Quarry fight was in Madison Square Garden. I fought on a week's notice when Buster Mathis pulled out with a bad back."

"I fought him the same year at the Forum in Los Angeles. I never realized how popular a guy could be. When they introduced him the whole roof came off. When they introduced me there were a couple of claps. Talk about feeling alone."

He could get no better than a draw.

"Everybody had me winning the fight," said Alongi. "Sports Illustrated even had an article about 'The Jab That Wiped Off A Smile.'"

Todd Herring, a hard-hitting Texan, George Logan and Jefferson Davis were among Alongi's toughest opponents.

"All week long they were saying Herring might have trouble with me for a couple of rounds and then get me. I stopped him on cuts in eight rounds."

"Jefferson Davis was my 27th in a row. That got me a national TV fight against George Logan, who was rated 10th in the world at the time. I won a decision in the Garden."

But it was a fight that never came off — with Doug Jones — that may have damaged his hopes for a title bout.

"I was in such great shape," said Alongi. "My manager Charley Goldman told me, don't box on the last day. I got in the ring with Greatest Crawford — just wanting to move around — not throw any hard punches.

"I was always more of a boxer. I thought the guy who gets hit the least, lasts the longest. But I chipped a bone in my elbow and was out almost a year with that one injury."

"Billy Daniels came in on one day's notice and stopped Jones in one round. Had I not got hurt, and beaten Doug Jones, I might be a millionaire."

Instead, he is an Ocala businessman with wife Cindy and four children — Jennifer, Joey, Christa and Angela.

"I love my family," said Alongi. "They are the best thing that ever happened to me."