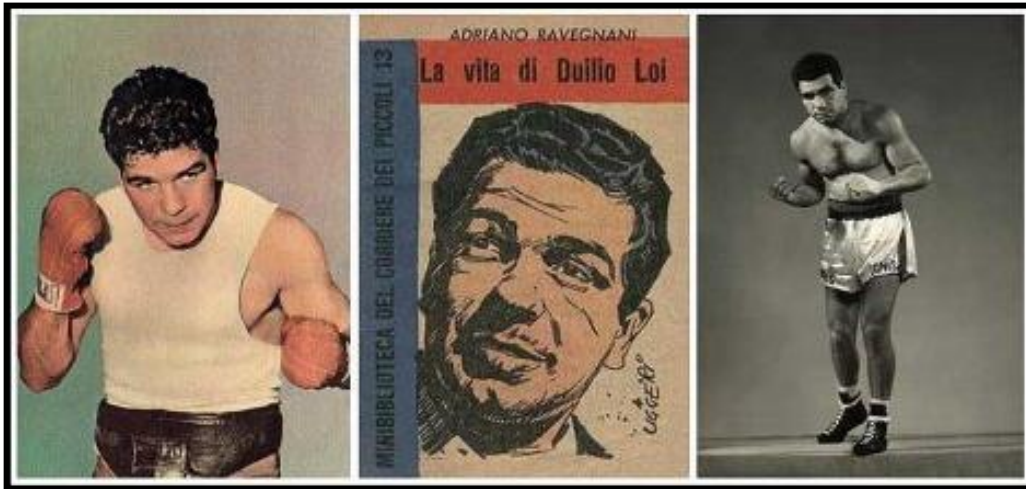


# A Barrel of Talent: Duilio Loi

By Mike Casey

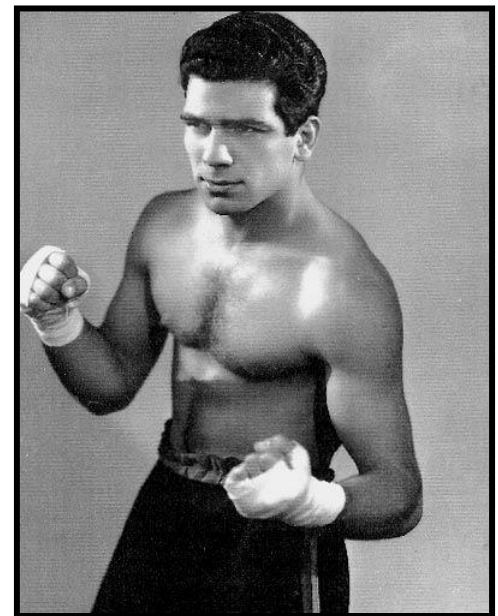


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Duilio Loi was built like a barrel and looked like the prototype slugger. But the brilliant Italian boxer from the port of Trieste (which would later produce Nino Benvenuti) possessed much more than a talent for brawling. Loi brought guile, cunning and often deceptive skill to the table, as well as a strong mind and a great ability to learn from his few mistakes. He was never a big puncher, but a smart and skillful hustler who pragmatically accepted his rare defeats as an education.

Loi was also a beautifully crafty boxer. Do we understand that word 'crafty' any more? Like so many of the great and well educated boxers of his era, Duilio could not only adjust his tactics accordingly to combat the different fighting styles of his opponents, but he could also outwit them by rolling, feinting, blocking and switching quickly from offense to defense whenever a tactical change was called for.



Duilio was an infernally difficult man to beat and lost just three of his 126 professional fights. Typically, he reversed all three defeats. He was a natural lightweight, yet during the course of his distinguished career, he won the world junior welterweight championship and also campaigned in the welterweight division. Loi found it very tough to step up in weight and it was testament to his pride and stubborn character that he learned to cope and thrive at the higher level.

Much like the wonderful Nicolino Locche, Loi was a constant fascination to me when I was a young boxing fan. Both of these fistic marvels seemed to operate below the radar in the pre-Internet era. The American boxing publications of that time tended to write mainly about American fighters, while most of the 'global' action got shoved away at the back of the magazine in small print.

Where Loi was concerned, all that changed when he bested Carlos Ortiz 2-1 in three fights for the junior welterweight championship. Getting the better of the great Carlos was never an easy thing to do and suddenly this stocky Italian called Loi was a mystery no more.

Patently waiting for a crack at Joe Brown's world lightweight championship, Carlos Ortiz was already recognized as an outstanding talent. British fans were certainly impressed when Carlos traveled to London and outpointed the formidable southpaw, Dave Charnley.

Keeping busy, Ortiz won the vacant junior welterweight championship in impressive style when he stopped Kenny Lane in two rounds at Madison Square Garden in 1959. For Carlos, however, this was little more than a stepping stone to the lightweight championship. Who wanted to be the junior welterweight champion? The division had only recently been revived and wasn't remotely sexy. Tippy Larkin had been its last champion in 1946 and Tippy only hung around to make one defense.

## **Contrast**

Ortiz, by contrast, found himself somewhat trapped. Much as he wanted to move straight on to a title tilt against Joe Brown, business in the junior welterweight class would keep Carlos tied up for almost another two years. The man mostly responsible for the delay was Duilio Loi.

Carlos defended his title against Loi at the Cow Palace in San Francisco in June 1960, winning a split decision in the first of a trilogy between the two modern greats. It would mark the only time that Ortiz would beat the brilliant Italian.

Their second match in the noisy furnace of the famous San Siro Stadium in Milan also split the three officials, with Loi getting the nod. Fans of both fighters were equally divided on who won these closely contested battles. In San Francisco, Carlos had won with the help of a knockdown that many considered to be a slip, although he was the stronger man in the home stretch.

At the San Siro, before a massive pro-Loi crowd of 65,000, it was the Italian who came on in the closing stages. Duilio fought a shrewd battle throughout, confusing Ortiz by cleverly switching tactics as the fight progressed. Loi was very much the canny counterpuncher in the early rounds as Carlos pressed the action. After eight rounds, Ortiz seemed to be on his way to victory as Duilio began to slow.

With the crowd urging on their hero, Loi found his

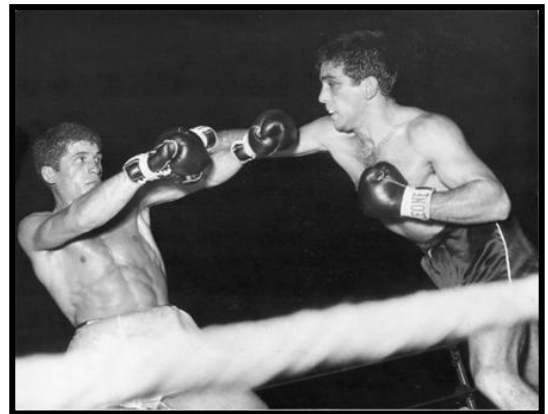


second wind and assumed the role of attacker as he scored repeatedly with hard body punches to have Carlos tucking up and retreating. The Italian was coming off better in the quality exchanges and showing his full range of deft skills as he bobbed and weaved under the champion's blows and found the mark with accurate jabs and hooks. When Carlos fired back, Loi took many of the punches on his arms and gloves.

Ortiz never stopped firing in his efforts to turn the fight around, but the battle was lost and so was his junior welterweight crown. Carlos returned to the San Siro for the rubber match with Loi in June 1961, but came up short again as the Italian fox won unanimously. A proud man, Ortiz felt bad about the two defeats and continued to question who was really the better fighter. The silver lining in his black cloud was that he was free to go back to the vastly more respected lightweight division and realize his great dream. He hammered out a pair of decisions over top contenders Doug Vaillant and Paolo Rosi and then went on to dethrone Joe Brown in Las Vegas.

## **Nobody**

It seemed that nobody on the American front had seen Loi coming. Largely unknown outside his native Italy, Duilio had been left in peace to compile an increasingly staggering record. The American fight fraternity of Loi's era tended to be dismissive of European fighters and, indeed, of foreign fighters in general. One has to understand that the fiercely competitive American school was far richer in quality at that time. It was very much the premier league of boxing, while other countries were seen as the second and third divisions of the sport.



But the cream always rises to the top, irrespective of its origin. Randy Turpin, Carlos Monzon, Nicolino Locche, Marcel Cerdan, John H. Stracey, Ken Buchanan and Lloyd Honeygan all proved they could win against any level of competition despite campaigning predominately in their own countries.

The incredible Loi rarely stepped beyond the shores of Europe, fighting once in London, once in Tunisia, three times in Australia and twice in America where he defeated Glen Flanagan and lost his first fight to Ortiz.

Born in April 1929, Duilio was 19 when he made his professional debut with a six-round points win over Nino Frangioni in Genoa in 1948. It marked the beginning of a near perfect journey as the young Italian ace sailed smoothly from one victory to another. Within four years, he was the Italian lightweight champion and sporting an undefeated record of 35-0-2. His first professional setback came in August 1952 when he lost a very controversial decision to Jorgen Johansen for the European lightweight title in Copenhagen, Denmark. A crowd of nearly 17,000 watched the fight and the loss was deeply disappointing to Loi. But Duilio's mental toughness matched his rugged physique and he continued to barrel his way up the rankings.

Thirteen wins and a draw propelled him into a rematch with Johansen, which Loi won comfortably on points at the Pallazo Dello Sport in Milan in 1954. The world suddenly sat up and took notice of the swarthy, powerful youngster with the winning habit. His name

appeared in The Ring's world ratings, where it would remain a permanent fixture until his retirement in 1962.

But how did you pronounce that name? It came us some relief to me when I discovered I wasn't the only one who had a problem with it! Indeed, there are How to pronounce Duilio Loi websites for those of us who aren't quite as clever as we like to think. Phonetically, it's 'Dweelio Loy' for those of you who have secretly wondered.

After settling his account with Jorgen Johansen, Loi just kept rolling along and would lose just twice more over the next eight years. Later in 1954, Duilio successfully defended his Italian lightweight title against the talented Bruno Visintin, who would compile a professional record of 78-9-2. Six years later, Loi would outscore Visintin again for the European welterweight crown.

On route to his trilogy of championship fights with Carlos Ortiz, Loi also scored victories over Glen Flanagan, Ray Famechon, Orlando Zulueta, faded former lightweight champion Wallace (Bud) Smith and Germany's Conny Rudhof.

Frenchman Famechon, a very clever boxer, had been outclassed by the incomparable Willie Pep in a challenge for Willie's featherweight championship, yet Ray was a master of the European circuit who would retire with a 102-14-3 record.

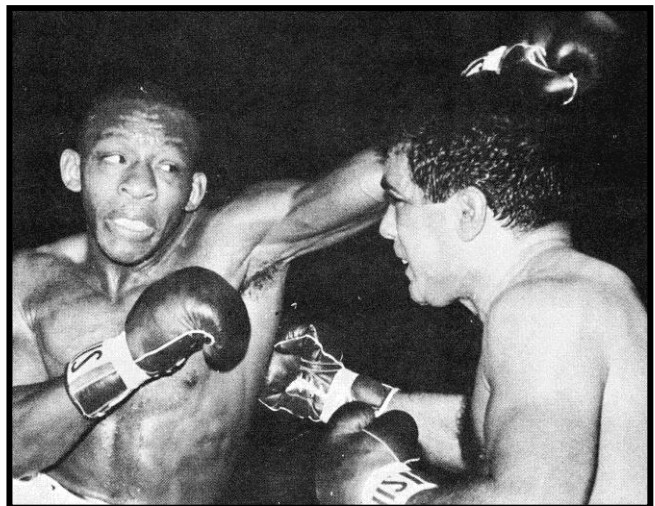
## Triumph

With his 2-1 series triumph over the great Carlos Ortiz, Duilio Loi had reached the pinnacle of his career and was acknowledged as an Italian sporting hero. However, another championship trilogy was to follow against another genuine and underrated great in Eddie Perkins. A wonderful pro, Perkins' career had been transformed by the great former bantamweight champion, Johnny Coulon, who trained journeyman Eddie and turned him into a world champion.

Take a look at Eddie's career record of 75-20-2. It is packed with quality and includes wins over Frankie Ryff, Paul Armstead, Paolo Rosi, Carlos Hernandez, Roberto Cruz, Bunny Grant, Kenny Lane, Adolph Pruitt, Borge Krogh, Maurice Cullen, Clyde Gray, Johann Orsolics, Angel Robinson Garcia, Armando Muniz and Ryu Sorimachi.

Perkins came desperately close to winning Loi's world title when he fought Duilio to a draw at the Pallazo Dello Sport in October 1961. Was the great Loi beginning to slide a little? The champion answered that question with seven non-title victories, including wins over Americans Billy Collins and Willie Stevenson, and a successful defense of the European welterweight title against Fortunato Manca.

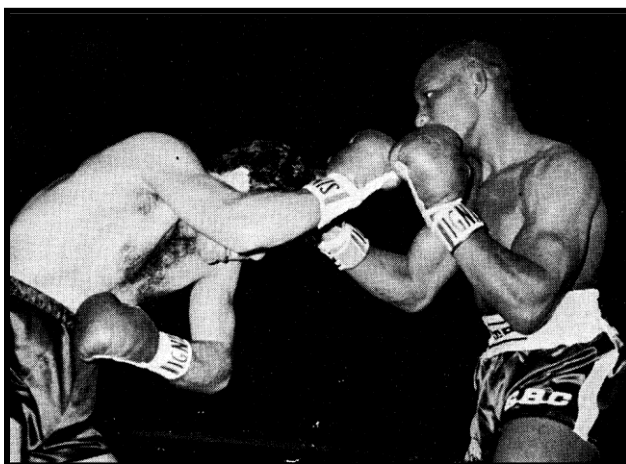
But in his second defense against Perkins in Milan in 1962, Loi got a big wake-up call as Eddie won the championship convincingly. United Press International reported: "The 25-year old Eddie Perkins battered 33-year old



Duilio Loi for nearly 15 rounds Friday night to wrest the world junior welterweight crown from the Trieste-born strongman before a capacity crowd of 20,000 at Milan's Velodrome. Eddie was on top throughout the fight and the closest he came to any trouble was when he slipped to the canvas in the 1st round and was flipped onto his back in the 14th by strange ju jitsu-like tactics by Loi."

Loi was philosophical about the loss and had the air of a man who was growing weary of his tough profession. "I will fight one or two more times just for the sake of my fans," he said, "and then I will withdraw from boxing. I do not think I was beaten this time, but maybe I am getting old."

At 33, he was actually getting quite old by the standard of his era, with 125 fights on his log over a 14-year span. But there had to be a happy ending for Loi. You just felt it was in the stars. Drawing on all his experience, resilience and downright gung-ho, the barrel of talent from Trieste summoned one last triumph that would cap a marvelous career. At the Pallazo Dello Sport, he regained the championship from Perkins in another engrossing 15-rounder.



The European Stars & Stripes reported: "Duilio Loi of Italy stepped up his pace and scored with some inside punching in the late rounds to win back the world junior welterweight title with a close decision over Eddie Perkins of the U.S. Perkins moved out rapidly at the opening bell, attacking at once. Perkins kept up his steady attack through the seventh, but the pattern began to shift in rounds eight and nine as Loi countered with increasing power. Slowly, Loi was working into his old late-round stride. Loi withstood a brief rally by Perkins in the 12th, and then continued to pile up points for the championship. It was a fast, steady-slugging battle from the start and the two fighters appeared to be on even terms throughout."

## **Perfect**

It was the perfect ending to Loi's career and he had the good sense to realize it. In January 1963, he retired from the ring and, like Rocky Marciano, never came back. As in Rocky's case, perhaps the gods felt the need to take something back after bestowing Loi with so much. Duilio contracted Alzheimer's disease and died on January 20, 2008, at the age of 78. One hopes that his fading brain still harbored some memories of the golden days.

***Mike Casey is a Boxing.com writer and Founder & Editor of ALL TIME BOXING at <https://sites.google.com/site/alltimeboxingrankings>. He is a freelance journalist and boxing historian and a member of the International Boxing Research Organization (IBRO).***