

Pistol Pete Ranzany

by Larry Carli



The former number 1 ranked welterweight contender of the 1970's is in excellent health and has done well financially while living in retirement in his hometown of Sacramento, California.

Pete Ranzany was not only Mr. Boxing in Sacramento, California, but he was probably the most popular sports star during the whole decade of the 1970's in his hometown. The next day coverage of a Pete Ranzany fight usually took up the whole front page in the sports sections of the local newspapers.

Pete was born on April 6, 1952, in Sacramento, and he was the youngest of five children. Pete's mother, Theda, raised her family by herself as Pete's father left the family right after his birth. Pete was raised in the lower income projects, known as Helvetia, near the downtown section of Sacramento. Pete's mother took odd jobs, including cleaning other people's houses to keep food on the table and using the Goodwill stores to cloth her children.

Pete learned to fight early, as his neighborhood was surrounded by a lot of Mexican gang members. Pete was eventually kicked out of high school for fighting and had to graduate from an adult continuation high school to get his diploma.

Pete was impressed how other men his age looked up to all the local amateur boxing stars, so one day Pete walked across town and ended up inside of Tommy O'Leary's boxing gym. O'Leary was a well known trainer of amateur and professional fighters, and he immediately saw talent in the hard punching, thin young teenager. In 1969, O'Leary put Pete in an amateur tournament in San Francisco and Pete ended up winning the 147 pound novice diamond belt championship and the 147 pound golden gloves title in 1970.

Pete had an amateur record of 6-1, before he walked into an army recruiter's office in 1970, and joined when he was told he could box for the United States army boxing team. Pete was shipped to Ford Ord, California, for boot camp and eventually met Pat Nappi, the United States Olympic boxing coach. Pete remembered that Nappi always had his fighters in excellent condition

Pete began representing the army in the amateur boxing ranks and he lost a decision to future world welterweight boxing champion Carlos Palomino in the 1972 All Army championships. Pete beat Palomino in a rematch in the 1972 Olympic quarterfinals and then lost to future Olympic gold medalist Sugar Ray Seales in the semi-finals. In 1973, Pete won the all service 139 pound welterweight championship and left the amateur ranks with an overall record of 35 wins, with just 4 loses. Pete became friends with Palomino while in the army and they would never meet in the ring in their professional boxing careers. When Pete got out of the army in 1973, he was a full-fledged 5-11 inch, 147 pound welterweight.

Pete's old amateur trainer, Tommy O'Leary, had passed away while he was in the army and he was undecided on his future. Pete received a telephone call while he was in Hawaii getting discharged out of the army from Sacramento Union sportswriter Ben Swezey. Pete advised Swezey that he had not made any plans to turn to professional boxing, when Swezey advised him that he had a group of local Sacramento businessmen who wished to manage and sponsor him in a professional career in boxing.

Pete returned to Sacramento upon his honorable discharge from the army and signed a contract with the local businessmen who named their corporation Ran-Sac. Ran-Sac named former lightweight contender Joey Lopes as their manager and local trainer Herman Carter as part of the Ranzany boxing circle. Pete had learned the basics of boxing from his amateur boxing coach Tommy O'Leary, and learned conditioning from Olympic coach Pat Nappi, but it was local trainer Herman Carter who taught Pete how to dig those hard lefts and rights to the body from long range.



Joey Lopes, Pete Ranzany and Herman Carter

Upon returning to Sacramento, Pete began taking social science classes at Cosumnes River community college, while preparing to turn professional. Pete turned professional in October of 1973 by knocking out Marc Thomas in one round in Sacramento. Thomas scored a flash knockdown at the beginning of the fight before Pete came roaring back more embarrassed than hurt to stop his opponent in the second minute of the fight. It was at this fight that Pete would meet his future wife, Rose

Pete won his first five professional fights by knockout. In his sixth fight, Pete had to go the distance for the first time, when he defeated ring cutie Jimmy Jackson,

by six round decision in Los Angeles, California. Jackson asked for a rematch and Pete agreed to it in Sacramento.

Pete tried hard for the knockout in the rematch and ended up losing a close decision to Jackson. Pete blamed this defeat on being overconfident and a lack of conditioning. Jackson ran during the fight and Pete just could not catch up to him. Pete won their rubber match by decision in February of 1975, and for good measure, he knocked Jackson out in their fourth fight in April of 1975. Pete was developing into a main event star as he knocked out former amateur boxing stars, Quincy Daniels, and David Oropeza. Pete closed out the year 1975 by knocking out Renato Garcia, Freddie Jones, and Ruben Vasquez Zamora.

In January of 1976 Pete won a decision over a real runner in Mike Avans and then stopped tough Mexican Manuel Leal with one body shot in the first round in February. After the Leal fight Pete became a fan favorite with the Mexican crowd due to his strong body punching attack. Prior to the Leal fight many of the Mexican fans were rooting for Pete's Mexican opponents, but a lot of that changed after the Leal fight.

Pete's first big name opponent was undefeated Puerto Rican Adolpho Viruet from New York. The fight was held in Sacramento on February 24 of 1976, and it was for the vacant North American welterweight title. Viruet was an awkward fighter and he was a southpaw. It took Pete a few rounds to figure out Viruet's style before he came on strong in the late rounds to take a majority decision and gain the North American title. Pete described Viruet as a cagey southpaw and felt that his power advantage was the difference in the fight. Even though Pete felt he won the fight handily, one of the local judges scored the fight a draw.

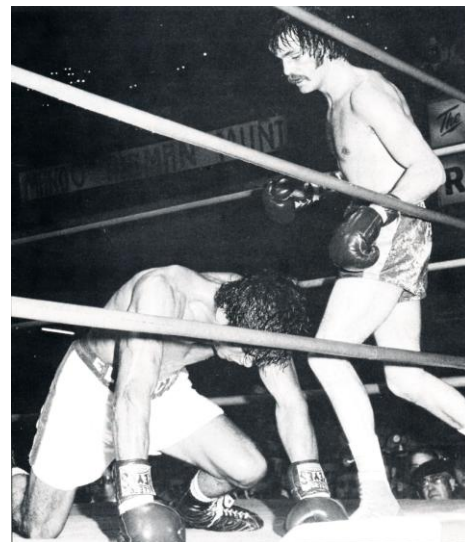
Pete now found himself in the top ten welterweight rankings and Pete's management team kept him busy as he climbed the welterweight rankings by fighting once a month and knocking out Benny Huertas in June, Keith Averette in July, and Chris Fernandez in August.

World ranked super lightweight Rudy Barro from Stockton, California, came to Sacramento in August to challenge Pete to a 10 round contest. Pete was simply too strong for Barro and knocked him out in one of the early rounds. Pete remembered that Barro was a very classy guy and that he came to Pete's dressing room after their fight with his family and congratulated him on his victory.

In November, Pete took on ranked super welterweight Gene Wells in an over the weight match. Pete matched Wells in the power department and was just too quick for him with his combinations. Pete took a relatively easy decision over Wells.

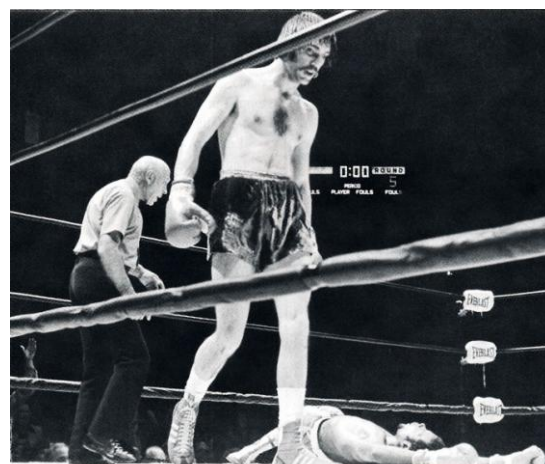
In December, Chilean welterweight champion Julio Gomez came to Sacramento to challenge Pete in a 10 round main event fight. Gomez put up a strong showing and cut Pete during the fight. Pete was lucky to come away with a technical decision win. Many people, who witnessed the fight, felt that Gomez was actually leading when the fight was stopped, and a rematch was in order.

Pete tuned up for the Gomez rematch by knocking out tough Mexican Abel Cordoba in January of 1977. The rematch with Gomez was set for March with the North American welterweight title on the line. Pete was in great shape for the rematch, and he fought one of the best technical fights of his career. In a very competitive fight, Pete won a well deserved unanimous decision to retain his title.



Ranzany kayoes Abel Cordoba

In May of 1977 Pete traveled to San Francisco, California to take on undefeated welterweight Bruce Finch. Some people at the time thought that Finch was going to be another Sugar Ray Leonard, but that comparison stopped when Pete knocked him out in the fifth round. Pete's real last name at the time was thought to be Ronzoni and the promoters hoped that the fight would bring out the Italian crowd in San Francisco. Unfortunately, what the promoters failed to realize was that San Francisco had not been a big fight town for a long time.



Ranzany kayoes Bruce Finch

Two weeks after the Finch fight, Pete beat Abel Cordoba in a rematch in Sacramento by decision. In July Pete traveled to Incline Village, Nevada for a supposed easy 10 round fight with club fighter Babilah (Babs) McCarthy. McCarthy made a strong showing and was very competitive in losing a 10 round decision to Pete. In the following month of August, Pete fought a rematch with McCarthy in Sacramento. Pete dominated the rematch, and dropped McCarthy enroute to an unanimous decision win.

In October Pete defended his North American welterweight championship belt against top ten contender Randy Shields from the Los Angeles, California area. Shields was cut badly by an accidental butt in the second round, and the contest was ruled a technical draw. In November, Pete took a 10 round decision from

Jose Luis Baltazar to set up a big money fight with fellow top ten welterweight contender, Armando Muniz. The Muniz fight was set for December of 1977, and a packed house at the Memorial Auditorium in Sacramento watched the fight.

Pete started off boxing well, and actually getting the better of the infighting against Muniz in the early rounds. Pete came out of a clinch in the fourth round with a gash over his eye due to a clash of heads. With the blood flowing freely from Pete's cut the fight had to be stopped at the end of the sixth round. Pete was leading on all three scorecards when the fight was stopped. The referee claimed that he did not see any butt, therefore Muniz was given a sixth round technical knockout win.

Not to be discouraged Pete put his North American welterweight title on the line in February of 1978 in a rematch with Randy Shields. Pete was the stronger fighter and he eventually wore Shields down, and stopped him in the eleventh round of the twelve round fight.

After the Shields fight, Pete became the number one contender for Pepino Cuevas' World Boxing Association welterweight title. Pete kept busy while negotiations were being made for a title fight by stopping Joe Grier in March, Rafael Rodriguez in May and Santiago Valdes in June of 1978



Ranzany knocks out Joe Grier's mouthpiece with a straight right to the stomach.

The fight with Cuevas for the welterweight title was set for outdoor Hughes Stadium in Sacramento. An unusual summer rain started and a canopy had to be put over the top of the ring. Pete was paid twenty five thousand dollars for his end of the fight and he went into serious training in Santa Rosa, California. Pete was aware of Cuevas power, and the game plan was to box Cuevas into the late rounds, and then come on strong. The crowd at Hughes Stadium produced over a four hundred thousand dollar gate.

Pete started off boxing carefully in the first round, and won it convincingly as Cuevas missed with all his power shots. Pete came back to his corner after the end of the first round to shouts of 'Pete' Pete' Pete' coming from the hometown crowd. Pete's trainer Herman Carter advised Pete to stick to their game plan, but instead Pete came out exchanging blows with Cuevas in the second



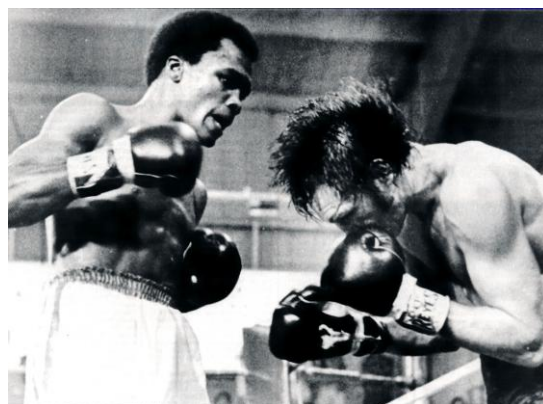
Ranzany takes a right hand from Cuevas

round. Pete was dropped by a right hand, only to get up and be dropped again by a powerful left hook along the ropes. Pete got up but he was unable to keep Cuevas off of him, and the referee stopped the fight and Cuevas was awarded a second round technical knockout win. Pete blamed himself for not listening to his trainer's advice for his defeat. Pete stated after the fight, that Cuevas was so awkward and easy to hit in the first round that he felt that he could have knocked him out in the second round. While watching for Cuevas' left hook to the body and head, Pete was hit with a straight right hand for the first knockdown. Pete also stated that Cuevas was the strongest puncher that he ever faced in his boxing career.

Pete related that after the Cuevas fight, he felt that he had let his hometown fans down, and he became somewhat of a recluse in his house for about a month. Pete however was back in action in November, and defeated Rafael Rodriguez in a rematch. In December, former top contender Jimmy Hear came to Sacramento to challenge Pete for his North American boxing federation welterweight title. Pete won an easy 12 round decision over the former top contender. Pete won eleven of the twelve rounds, as Hear showed none of the skills which made him a top contender at one time.

Pete won a couple of tune ups fights before he defended his title again against top welterweight contender Clyde Gray. Gray had fought for the welterweight title before and had given former champion Jose Napoles a tough fifteen round fight before losing a close unanimous decision. In June Pete fought one of the best fights of his career, as he methodically hammered Gray into a fifth round technical knockout.

Pete next defended his title against undefeated contender Sugar Ray Leonard in August of 1979 in Las Vegas. Leonard had won an Olympic gold medal and was being primed for a shot at the welterweight title. Pete suffered one of the worst defeats of his career as Leonard continually beat him to the punch and stopped him in the fourth round of a one sided beat down. When Pete went to congratulate Leonard in his dressing room after the fight some members of the Leonard entourage slammed the door in his face.



Ray Leonard hammers away at Ranzany

Pete remembered that Leonard's trainer Angelo Dundee came to his hotel room after the fight, and told Pete that he had just lost to a great fighter, and that he felt that Pete should not retire, as he was still capable of beating some of the top

contenders in the division. Pete never forgot Dundee's kind words after the fight and always felt that Dundee was a man of class and integrity. Pete felt that Leonard was the most complete fighter that he had ever fought in the ring.

Pete took six months off from boxing after the Leonard fight, and returned to the ring in February of 1980 to take on Leonard's sparring partner, Wilson Bell. Bell did not have the same luck as Leonard and Pete stopped him in the seventh round of a one sided fight. Pete kept his high ranking by staying busy and beating Jose Dominguez, Agapito Ramirez, Ray Hammond, and Mauricio Aldana to set up a big local matchup with local prospect Salamon (Sal) Lopez. Lopez was also from Sacramento and he was ranked in the top ten in the super lightweight division. Lopez was undefeated in eighteen pro fights and he had been part of the Cuevas camp when Pete had fought for the world title.

The fight was set up for September of 1980 in Hughes Stadium, the same venue where Ranzany had lost to Cuevas. The bout was billed for the welterweight championship of Sacramento and it developed a lot of local interest due to constant newspaper coverage.

Pete fought one of the most aggressive fights of his career as he boxed Lopez at long range and roughed him up in close quarters. Lopez had the faster hands and threw lightning quick combinations, but he could not keep Ranzany off of him in the infighting. Lopez was badly cut during the fight and was unable to get off of his stool to start the seventh round. Ranzany won by a six round technical knockout and was proclaimed the welterweight champion of Sacramento.

Instead of going after the super welterweight title, Pete's management team decided to take a fight against former welterweight champion Wilfred Benitez in December of 1980. Benitez was a brilliant boxer whose only loss had been to Sugar Ray Leonard when he lost his title.

Pete put up a game effort against Benitez in losing a competitive unanimous decision. Two of the judges' scorecards had Pete winning three rounds with one round even in the ten round fight. Pete claimed that Benitez was the best defensive fighter that he had ever fought. Pete thought that Benitez had radar as he continually slipped his punches at the last possible second.

Pete started off 1981 by winning six straight fights by knockout before he was upset by Pat Hallacy in December. Pete looked lethargic in this fight and he had just lost to a big underdog. In April of 1982 Pete took a fight in Detroit and lost to Milton McCrory a future welterweight champion and stablemate of Tommy Hearns. Pete made the fight competitive, but he had lost a step and McCrory walked off with the decision.

Pete's next big fight was against former lightweight champion Sean O'Grady in October of 1982 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Pete won the first three rounds easily and then in the fourth round he was thumbed in the eye by O'Grady. Pete's vision was affected, but he regrouped to come back and take the decision from O'Grady. Pete did not realize it at the time, but he had suffered a torn retina from O'Grady's thumbing. Pete always felt that O'Grady did not thumb him on purpose and just felt that it was part of boxing.

Pete signed to fight undefeated Nino LaRocca in Italy in a nationally televised fight. Pete took a tune up fight and knocked out Frankie Moultrie before his trip to Italy. While sparring for the LaRocca fight, Pete felt that he had lost his depth perception and did not do well in training. Pete lasted the ten round distance with LaRocca in losing a unanimous decision. LaRocca had a record of 50-0 before he fought Pete.

After the LaRocca fight, Pete went to a doctor and he was advised that he had been fighting with a torn retina. The doctor advised Pete that if he continued his ring career he could eventually go blind. Pete wisely took the doctor's advice and retired from the ring with a record of 59 wins with 8 loses, and 2 draws. Pete won 38 fights by knockout.

Upon his retirement, Pete married his longtime girlfriend Rose and they had one son. Pete had been a communications major at California State University Sacramento while he was still fighting. Pete eventually obtained a job as a warehouseman at a local Raley's supermarket in Sacramento.

Pete had remained with the Ran-Sac Corporation throughout his career and feels that he grossed approximately four hundred thousand dollars during his career. Pete bought his first house while working at the Raley's supermarket chain and then decided that he wanted to work in the correctional officer field.

Former opponent Sal Lopez was a counselor at the Folsom State Prison and he helped talk Pete into applying as a correctional officer with the state of California. Pete began his career as a correctional officer in the Folsom state prison system in 1989 and retired in 2017 after putting in 28 years at his job. Pete is still in good condition as he currently weights about 175 pounds and looks like he can still go ten fast rounds in the ring.

In regards to his prison experience, Pete claimed that he was unaware such hardcore inmates existed until he took the job as a correctional officer. Pete claims he only had one incident in his whole career, where he had to fight an inmate, and he ended that fight with one punch to the body. Pete tried to coach a boxing team at the prison, but the inmates had no discipline, and Pete gave up on the idea. Pete also recalled how mass murderer inmate Kenneth Bianchi tried

to befriend him at the prison, because they were both of Italian descent. Pete recalled that Bianchi tried to act normal, until he saw Pete talking to a female employee. Bianchi exploded in a verbal temper tantrum condemning women and went totally out of control.

Pete has been to Italy several times with his wife, and actually found out through relatives in northern Italy that his grandfather's real last name was Ranzzini, and not Ronzoni as written in all his boxing articles.

Pete was happy with his career and wishes that he would have had a second chance at a world title before he retired. Pete would have liked to have fought Carlos Palomino for the title and there were several attempts to make that fight, but for various promotional reasons it did not happen.

It is my opinion that had Pete had better managerial connections in the sport, such as Carlos Palomino had with Jackie McCoy, that he could very easily had won a version of the welterweight championship during the late 1970's. I believe a fight in Sacramento between Pete and Palomino would have been a tossup, and a great fight to have watched.



Pete Ranzany today holding up his championship belts

Pete was inducted into the Sacramento Sports Hall of Fame recently and one year during his career he was awarded the title of Athlete of the Year by a local newspaper. Pete has his health and is financially secure. Pete lives with his wife Rose, in a beautiful home in a Sacramento suburb with a large swimming pool in the backyard and a Lexus automobile parked in his driveway. Pete has come a long way from the young kid who had to wear Goodwill clothes to school.

Larry Carli is a retired Sheriff Detective and District Attorney Criminal Investigator from Sacramento County, California. He is the author of two books: *The Top Ten Middleweight Champions of All Time* (2017, Robertson Publishing) and *The Illinois Thunderbolt: The Life Story of Billy Papke* (Outskirts Press, 2015), and has written freelance boxing articles for *Boxing Illustrated*, *Fight Beat*, and *The Ring* magazines. He is also a proud member of the International Boxing Research Organization, the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association, and the California Writers Club.