

SIDNEY "SWEET PEA" ADAMS PASSES

Story by John DiSanto

Former Philly fighter Sidney "Sweet Pea" Adams passed away on May 28, 2020, after a long battle with cancer. He was 84 years old. Born December 16, 1935, Adams' very best days as a boxer came during his amateur run, which ended in 1957.

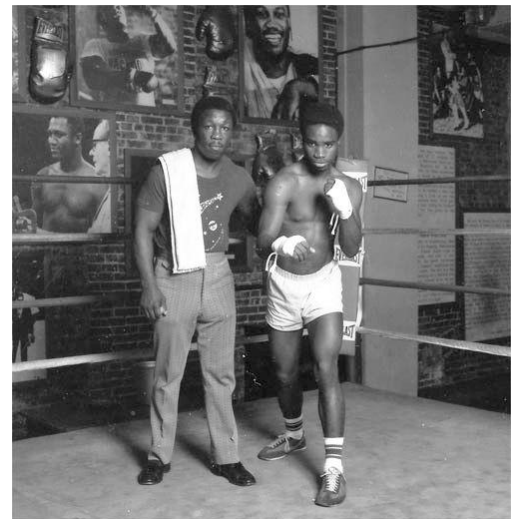
After winning a number of local tournaments, Adams won the Junior National AAU championship at 139 pounds. Fighting out of the Philadelphia PAL system, Adams wiped out his competition in Baltimore that year, scoring knockdowns over all three of his foes and scoring the only clear-cut knockout of the entire tournament in his semi-final match. In the finals, Adams won by TKO over Avon Hollman when the referee would not allow the Baltimore fighter to come out for the third and final round. The victory earned Adams the coveted Junior National Amateur Championship. He was also voted the most outstanding boxer of the national tournament.



Adams turned professional in 1958 at the Cambria AC, with a six-round decision over Terry Roberts. The victory started a thirteen-bout unbeaten streak that included wins over Jethro Cason (KO2), JD Ellis (W6), "Sweet Cakes" Brown Lee (TKO5), Bobby Rogers (W8), Freddie Jackson (KO1), Luke Easter (W6). He was managed by Marty Stein, who in his entire career as a manager only selected three boxers to guide - Adams, Garnet "Sugar" Hart, and John Patrick Britt, all of whom won National Amateur championships.

Adams lost his first bout by eight-round decision to Johnny Palmer in 1959, but bounced back with three consecutive wins over Stan Fitzgerald, Wayman Dawson, and Chuck Taylor, putting him right back on track as a very promising prospect.

However, Sidney's career began to take a downturn when he was rushed into a match with Kenny Lane on September 27, 1960. Adams entered the fight with a respectable young record of 15-1-1, 9 KOs, but Lane was far more seasoned at 61-8. Lane had already beaten outstanding boxers like Carlos Ortiz, Virgil Akins, Ralph Dupas, Orlando Zulueta (3x), Johnny Gonslaves (2x), Ray Lancaster, and Philly's Henry "Toothpick" Brown. On paper, the fight didn't make sense for Adams, and things played out exactly the same way. Lane stopped Adams in the first round.



Adams as a trainer at the Joe Frazier Gym (Cloverlay Gym) in 1979

Sweet Pea came back five months later and struggled to win on points against Willie "Pineapple" Stevenson. He then lost by TKO to Jose Stable at St. Nicholas Arena in New York. These three fights, especially the two losses to Stable and Lane took much out of Adams. Still he beat JD Ellis later in 1961 and then drew with Johnny Palmer in 1962. However, his next two bouts, two decision losses to Percy Manning and Jethro Cason, convinced Adams to retire from the ring for good.

After his fighting career, Sidney worked at the Philadelphia International Airport and also helped to train fighters - including Bennie Briscoe - at the Joe Frazier Gym in North Philly. He married his wife Vivian in 1963 (57 years) and had one adopted son, Edward Adams.

In all, Adams posted a professional record of 17-5-2, with 9 KOs between 1958 and 1962. His fine career earned him a place in the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame in 2009. Sweet Pea was a wonderful guy and regularly attended the Briscoe Awards, where every year he added some star power to the proceedings while representing the past Philly greats. He was one of the very last senior statesmen of Philadelphia boxing. Sweet Pea will be greatly missed.



[Adams with J Russell Peltz at the Briscoe Awards in 2015]

[Adams with Bennie Briscoe outside the Joe Frazier Gym]

[Adams at his 2009 Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame Induction]

Note: Sidney Adams died on the same day (May 28, 2020) as former Philly middleweight Jimmie Sykes.

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