

BROTHER NAAZIM RICHARDSON PASSES AT AGE 55

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Photos by Darryl Cobb Jr. / dcobbjr.com

On July 24th, local boxing legend, Brother Naazim Richardson passed away after a long hospital stay and declining health, following a stroke earlier this year. Richardson earned his well-respected reputation by being a renowned amateur coach and later a storied trainer of top-level professionals. Richardson was 55.



Richardson was one of the most brilliant boxing minds in the business, and was considered a master of ring strategy. He devised numerous fight plans that helped lead his fighters to many important ring victories.

Richardson is probably best known as the trainer of Bernard Hopkins, a role he assumed after Hopkins split with long-time trainer Bouie Fisher in 2001. Richardson, a protégé of Fisher's, easily made the transition from assistant trainer to head-trainer for the all-time great.

Richardson was the main man in Bernard's corner for some of his most important wins, including his victories over Antonio Tarver, Oscar De La Hoya, Kelly Pavlik, Tavoris Cloud, and others. However, Hopkins was far from Richardson's only well-known client.

Richardson also trained his twin sons, Tiger Allen and Rock Allen, throughout their fine amateur careers as well as their brief professional runs. Naazim also served as head trainer for his nephews Karl Dargan, another decorated amateur and professional lightweight contender, and Mike Dargan.



However, some of Richardson's most memorable moments came while in the corner of two-time cruiserweight

world champion Steve Cunningham. In 2014, Cunningham fought for the USBA heavyweight title against Amir Mansour. In round five, Mansour dropped Cunningham twice and although Steve climbed to his feet after both knockdowns, it did not appear he would last much longer in the fight. But between rounds, Richardson worked his magic, calming Cunningham down, centering him, and doling out sound advice not only for survival in the bout's second half, but also for regaining control of the fight. Cunningham did both and went on to win the decision and the United States championship belt.



Richardson flanked by Steve Cunningham and Karl Dargan

To the boxing world outside of Philadelphia, Richardson is perhaps best remembered as the man who discovered Antonio Margarito's loaded hand wraps prior to his fight with Shane Mosley in 2009. Richardson, by then a busy trainer-for-hire, was engaged by Mosley to lead his corner. It was a decision that probably saved Mosley in the fight.



Richardson wrapping Steve Cunningham's hands

While observing the wrapping of Margarito's hands,

Naazim noticed something fishy and spoke up to the Los Angeles commission inspectors. Margarito's hands were rewrapped, and Mosley went on to stop the Mexican in round nine. Margarito was fined and suspended after the controversy.

Richardson also worked as a trainer for Sergio Martinez, Rocky Sanchez, Travis Kauffman, as well as the many members of his "Concrete Jungle Boxing Tribe", including Khalib Whitmore, and many others.

Richardson primarily worked out of West Philly's James Shuler Memorial Boxing Gym, lured there by Shuler proprietor Buster Custus, after Richardson left North

Philly's Champ's Gym. Custus credited Richardson with pushing the Shuler Gym to get involved with the big amateur tournaments outside of Philadelphia. With Richardson constantly pressing Custus, Shuler Gym fighters finally began competing in and winning regional and national amateur championships.

With Philly's first female trainer, Shar'ron Baker as his right hand, Richardson, along with Buster Custus, worked the corner for many of the Shuler Gym boxers for more than two decades (Jamaal Davis, Yusaf Mack, Stephen Fulton, etc.). No matter how big Richardson became in the boxing world, he helped anyone who asked his for assistance or advice.

When he wasn't in the corner, Richardson was a top-ranked talker and could discuss boxing better than anyone around. He loved to talk about the fight game, and in addition to passionately asserting his strong opinions about fights and fighters, he always wanted to hear the opinions of others as well. Conversations with Richardson were always two-way, but when it came to talking, he had more stamina than anyone and always got in the last word. He was always willing to go on the record for published stories, but told some of his best and eye-opening stories *off* the record.

Brother Naazim Richardson lived, breathed, and slept boxing, and he taught everyone that he came in contact with more about the sport than they ever knew before.

Although Richardson had been out of action due to his recent health issues, by trainer standards, he was still a young man. At 55 years old, Brother Naazim was only about half-way through his legendary training career. His untimely death not only cut short his vibrant life, but also left a massive void in the lives of the boxers he worked with, most of whom considered him family.

He will be greatly missed by the many people he touched throughout his long association with boxing. He was a one-of-a-kind personality and a one-of-a-kind talent.

Richardson previously suffered a stroke in 2007, but made a complete recovery and worked constantly until early this year. In January he had another stroke, but struggled with recovery this time. He died on Friday, July 24, 2020. However, no official cause of death was reported.

Brother Naazim Richardson entered the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame in 2014.