

# Garry Garber Succumbed to Covid-19 at 89

Obituary by Mike Silver

Eighty-nine year old Garry Garber succumbed to the Covid-19 virus on June 20, 2020. The former amateur star won a slew of military titles including the World Wide All Army Tournament Bantamweight championship in 1950. He was voted outstanding boxer in the tournament. According to his daughter, Leslie, the 5-foot-3 Garber joined the Army at 15, lying about his age. His first trainer was Al Avila, who managed Jesse Flores, a professional lightweight contender. After his enlistment was up Garry enrolled in the University of Maryland but was called back to service during the Korean War. After his army service ended Garber returned to the University of Maryland where he was a standout amateur boxer when inter-collegiate boxing was still in existence. He won the NCCA Intercollegiate bantamweight championship in 1954, and was the only American to win a gold medal at Israel's 1965 Maccabiah Games.



Garber's interesting but brief professional career came too late to fully realize the potential he'd shown as a world class amateur boxer. Thanks to diet, vitamins and improved living standards by the 1960s there were few top ranked American professional boxers in the flyweight or bantam divisions. Filling the ranks were foreign fighters from the Far East, Mexico, South America and Australia. Nevertheless, still wanting to fulfill an ambition to fight the best Garber would not be satisfied until he tested his skills against the world's top bantamweights. His pro career was managed by Baltimore's Benny Trotta who had contacts with the international booking agent Dewey Fragetta. So, in 1967, at the age of 37, Garber fought his first pro bout against Cowboy Billy Smith, an up and coming professional with a 22-4 won-lost record. Garber stopped him in the 5<sup>th</sup> round. In his very next pro fight, on July 11<sup>th</sup> 1968, he traveled to Sydney, Australia to take on 4<sup>th</sup> rated bantamweight contender Lionel Rose who sported a 25-2 record. Garber lost the ten round decision. Three months later Rose became the first aborigine in boxing history to win a world championship when he outpointed the great Fighting Harada for the bantamweight title.

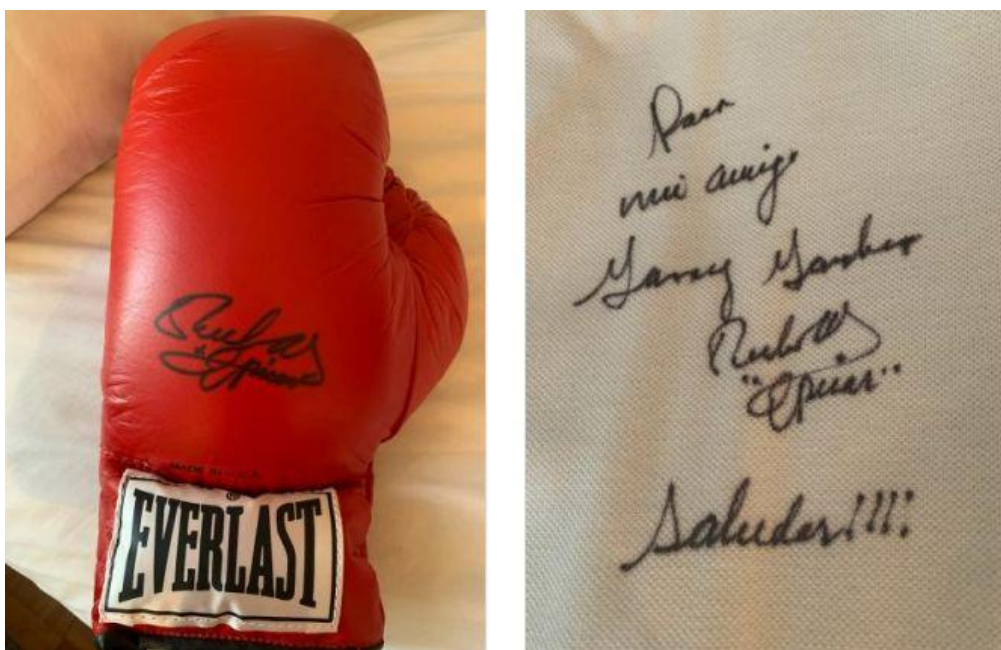
Eight months after losing to Rose, Garber found himself in Mexico facing another world ranked bantamweight contender—the future all-time great KO artist, Rubin Olivares. His team was hoping for an upset but this time Garber was in over his head: *"He was great", said Garber. He dropped me in the 5<sup>th</sup> round. I got up to continue at the count of 6 but the referee stopped it. Lucky for me. The little SOB would probably have killed me. I did spin hell out of him in the first three rounds but he was too much. A great fighter."* Garry had great respect for both Rose and Olivares and the feeling was mutual. He kept up a correspondence with them that lasted for years.

Garber made the most of his post boxing life devoting years to community service. He became a social worker and was a founding member of the Roving Leaders Program of Washington, DC's Department of Parks and Recreation, where he worked as a drug and delinquency prevention counselor from 1956 until his retirement in 1991. He wanted to do all he could for the Latino community, especially its youngest members, who he believed

needed some direction. “He was a lifesaver to many of those young kids,” said Jose Sueiro, who owns a consulting firm and is the managing director of the Metro DC Hispanic Contractors Association. “He did an enormous amount of stuff that was above and beyond.”

Garry Garber, a California native, was the son of a Mexican immigrant. He was originally named after his father, Pedro Garabito Sr., who died months before he was born. Garber, who was raised Catholic, converted to Judaism and changed his name to Garry Garber after he was discharged from the Army and before he married Annette, his wife of 65 years. Throughout his life he remained an active and outstanding member of his synagogue and community. He is a member of the Boxing Hall of Fames in the District and Maryland, and also the University of Maryland Sports Hall of Fame.

Note: Additional information was provided by Leslie Garber and The Washington Post.



Mike, I found a few items that were sent to Dad from Reuben Olivares. The signature was on a big shirt. Throughout the years they sent holiday cards to each other. LG

### PROFESSIONAL RECORD

Born: September 16, 1930

#### 1967

Oct 3	Cowboy Billy Smith	Palisades Rink, McKeesport, Pennsylvania	W TKO	5
Nov 20	Lionel Rose	Sydney Stadium, Sydney, NSW, Australia	L PTS	10

#### 1968

Jul 11	Ruben Olivares	Plaza de Toros, Torreon, Coahuila de Zaragoza, Mexico	L TKO	5
Oct 16	Billy Brown	Starland Arena, Roanoke, Virginia	W PTS	8

#### 1969

Jan 31	Billy McGrandle	Sales Pavilion, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada	L PTS	10
Mar 3	Chuck Spencer	Palisades Rink, McKeesport, Pennsylvania	L PTS	12