

# RIP Jim McCourt

By Patrick Myler

The seven times Irish amateur champion and Olympic Games bronze medalist, died in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on June 19, 2023 at age 79. His daughter, Cathy, said he passed away suddenly after overcoming a recent illness.



A native of Belfast, McCourt was a skillful southpaw and the only member of the Irish team to win a medal at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. After winning his first three bouts, he lost on a controversial decision to the Russian Viliqton Barannikov in the lightweight semi-final. Years later, Barannikov contacted McCourt to apologize about the verdict, saying it had been on his conscience ever since and admitted that the Irishman deserved to be named the winner.

The Irishman showed his true worth when he faced the 1964 Olympic gold medalist, Jozef Grudzien, in Dublin the following year in an Ireland v Poland international tournament. McCourt's masterful counter punching and tight defence enabled him to take the verdict on a split decision.

He won a bronze medal at the 1965 European championships and, the following year, moved up to light-welterweight to capture a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Jamaica. He got a second chance at Olympic glory in 1968 in Mexico but made a quick exit. He was beaten in his first outing after not fully recovering from a sudden brief illness.

A dispute with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association cost McCourt a third Olympics shot, this time in Munich, West Germany, in 1972. The controlling body had stipulated that each member of the Olympic squad should take part in collective training sessions in Dublin. When McCourt insisted he would be better prepared by continuing to work with his trusted trainers at the Immaculata club in Belfast and sparring with experienced professionals, the board refused to back down and he was withdrawn from the Irish team. By sticking rigidly to his principles, McCourt's international campaigning was over at the age of 28.

In his retirement, he reflected on his career and expressed regret that he had not turned professional. But long-time Belfast Telegraph boxing correspondent, the late Jack Magowen, disagreed: "Jim was a thinking man's champion, too clinical for the gore and glory arena of professional boxing and was wise, I thought, not to venture into the paid ranks."