

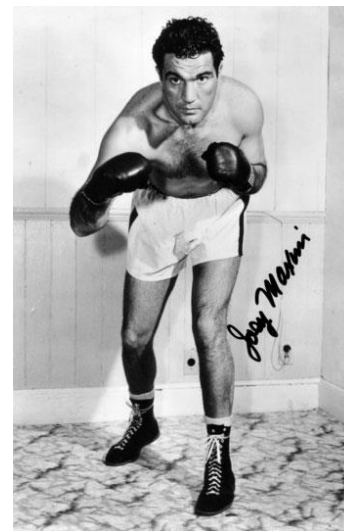
## Joey Maxim: One of the Crafiest Defensive Boxers of All-Time

By Dan Cuoco

Joey Maxim was born Giuseppe Antonio Berardinelli on March 28, 1922, in the Collinwood neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. He chose the ring name Joey Maxim from the Maxim gun, the world's first self-acting machine gun, based on his ability to throw rapid-fired left jabs.

Tracy Callis, IBRO Director of Historical Research, wrote: "*Joey Maxim was a talented boxer - very methodical, almost mechanical. He was not a big puncher but was clever and difficult to hit squarely.*"

Like hall-of-fame master boxer Tommy Loughran, Joey fought much larger opponents, giving away height and weight. He learned to survive against these bigger opponents by becoming a crafty defensive fighter, adept at blocking and picking off punches with his gloves and arms. Joey became a master at tying up an opponent and in the lost art of feinting. He also developed an excellent left jab, which he used as a defensive as well as an offensive weapon. He combined these traits with plenty of guts, a formidable chin, and stamina.



Maxim's first manager was Vic Rebersak, who brought him up through the amateurs from a 12-year-old flyweight and guided him through a successful amateur career. Rebersak was more than a manager. He practically adopted Joey, and he had a fatherly affection for him. In 1937, Joey entered the Cleveland Golden Gloves, competing in the 126-pound novice division, winning his first three fights before losing in the semi-finals. In 1938, he lost a three-round decision in the Cleveland Golden Gloves 135-pound open class quarter-finals to Bobby Kearns. Joey went undefeated the balance of the year, including two decisions over Kearns. In 1939, a month shy of his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, he lost a three-round decision to Jimmy Bivins in the Cleveland Golden Gloves 147-pound open finals. In 1940, he won the following regional and national titles: 160-pound Cleveland Golden Gloves, 160-pound Western Golden Gloves, 160-pound Tournament of Champions, 160-pound National AAU Championship, and the 160-pound AAU-Golden Gloves Winners Tournament. He finished his amateur career with a reported record of 125-19. (*Pic. Joey Maxim and Bob Jacobs 1940*)



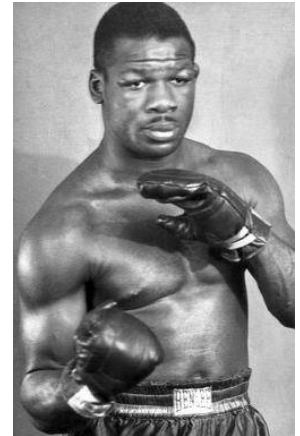
He turned pro under the management of Rebersak and trainer Johnny Papke at age 18, winning a four-round decision over Bob Perry in Cleveland on January 13, 1941. Because of his extensive amateur background, he quickly graduated to world title contention with impressive victories over experienced veterans Lee Oma, Nate Bolden, Bill Petersen, and Red Burman. *The Ring* magazine rated him their eighth world-rated light heavyweight contender at year's end.

In 1942, Joey had sixteen fights and lost six of them. Two were to Ezzard Charles, whom Joey never could handle, Ezzard beating him five for five. He also dropped decisions to Booker Beckwith, Altus Allen, Jimmy Bivins and lost on a foul to Charley Roth. Two weeks after losing to Roth, Joey kayoed Roth in the fourth round. He also beat Curtis (Hatchet Man) Sheppard, Larry Lane, Hubert Hood, and Lou Brooks. *The Ring* magazine rated him their tenth world-rated heavyweight at year's end. This was the start of a trend

wherein he would bounce back and forth between light heavyweight and heavyweight in the *Ring* world ratings from 1942 to 1955.

## Curtis (Hatchet Man) Sheppard

On March 10, 1943, Joey engaged murderous puncher Curtis (Hatchet Man) Sheppard a second time and was kayoed in the first round. This was the only time Joey failed to go the distance in his eighteen-year professional career covering 116 fights. The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported, "*Slow to break into his familiar dancing step, Maxim was moving alongside the ropes, confident and unsuspecting, when the Hatchet Man came on in a half circle, then leaped in with the first of four roaring rights to Joey's jaw. Glassy of eye and goofy, our former Golden Gloves and national amateur middleweight champion was done then. But the top rope on his right held him up as he swayed, a pathetic target for the succeeding batch of overhand slugs. When the last one thundered across, Joey slowly dropped away from the rope and turned over on his side, reaching the mat. The spectators stood awe-stricken while Referee Joe Stedley counted ten. Cornerman Johnny Papke stated. "I told him he was carrying that left too low all week."* (Pic. Curtis (Hatchet Man) Sheppard)



The two met in a rubber match three weeks later in the same ring. Joey gave Curtis a boxing lesson this time, winning a unanimous decision. Sheppard stalked Joey throughout, hoping to repeat his kayo performance, but Joey kept peppering him with left jabs and never gave him an opening.

## The Military Years

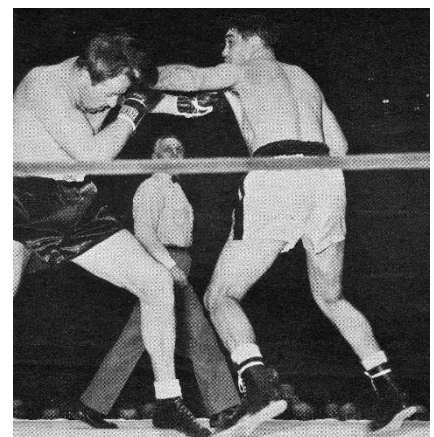
Joey served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946 as a fitness instructor at Fort Bragg, N.C., and military policeman in Miami Beach, Fla., and squeezed in thirteen professional fights, beating Johnny Flanagan, Nate Bolden, Clarence Brown, Cleo Everett, Buddy Scott, Claudio Villar, Georgie Parks, Buddy Walker, Bob Garner, and Frank Androff, and dropping decisions to Lloyd Marshall, and Johnny Flynn. During this time, he began appearing on several fight cards promoted by Jack (Doc) Kearns, who saw great promise in him and took over as his manager in late 1944.

## Return to Civilian Life

In early 1946, Joey was discharged from the Army and Doc Kearns returned him to an active schedule, engaging in sixteen fights and compiling a record of 12-2-2. He won decisions over Jersey Joe Walcott, Phil Muscato (twice), Buddy Walker, Panther Williams, Dolph Quijano, Clarence Jones, Jack Marshall, and Henry Cooper, stopped Ralph DeJohn, Jimmy Webb, and Bearcut Jones, lost decisions to Phil Muscato and John Thomas, and drew with Charley Eagle and Jimmy Richie.

In 1947, he lost twice to Jersey Joe Walcott, defeated Bob Foxworth, and Billy Thompson, avenged a previous loss to John Thomas, stopped Marty Clark, and kayoed Charley Roth and Clarence Jones to finish the year 6-2. *The Ring* magazine rated him their seventh world heavyweight contender at year's end.

On January 9, 1948, Joey made his Madison Square Garden debut against Sweden's Olle Tandberg who had upset Joe Baksi in Sweden in July 1947 and was making his United States debut. Maxim was picked as a stepping stone in the build-up for a shot as heavyweight champion Joe Louis' next title challenger. (Pic. Maxim, white trunks vs Tandberg) But the 6'3"



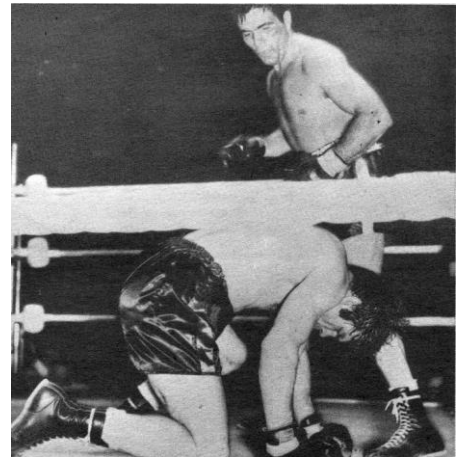
Tandberg, who outweighed Joey by 29 pounds, 208 to 179, counted himself out of a title shot in 30 brief fighting minutes. He exhibited nothing but a willingness to try. Joey handled him with ease as he jabbed him, hooked him, spun him around, and scored with clever counters. Several sports writers stated that Joey's "cutey" tactics might make him a worthy title contender for Joe Louis or light-heavyweight champion Gus Lesnevich. The fact that he weighed 179 pounds showed that he only needed to shave off four pounds to meet the 175-pound limit.

Neither opportunity panned out, and Joey finished the year with a winning record of 11-1-2. Besides Tandberg, he defeated Jimmy Bivins, Bob Satterfield, Joe Kahut, Roy Hawkins, Bob Sikes, Bill Petersen (twice), Tony Bosnich, Whitey Berlier, Francisco de la Cruz, Roy Hawkins, lost a controversial decision to Joe Kahut in a rematch, and drew twice with Pat Valentino. He ended the year as *Ring* magazine's fifth-rated heavyweight behind Jersey Joe Walcott, Ezzard Charles, Lee Savold, and Johnny Flynn.

Joey started 1949 by dropping another decision to Ezzard Charles but bounced back by winning the vacant American Light Heavyweight Title recognized by the National Boxing Association (NBA) by unanimous decision over Gus Lesnevich. Joey used his rapier-like left to perfection in winning the 15-round title fight. Gus said he had no alibi and lost because he couldn't keep his face away from Maxim's flicking left. Joey finished the year by stopping Joe Kahut in four rounds (in their rubber match), stopping Pat McCafferty in four rounds, and outpointing Bill Petersen for the third time in 18 months. *The Ring* magazine rated him their number one world-rated light heavyweight contender at year's end.

## World Champion

On January 24, 1950, before a record indoor British fight crowd of more than 20,000, Joey won the world's light-heavyweight championship by knocking out England's Freddie Mills at 1:54 of the 10th round in their scheduled 15-rounder at Earl's Court. Although Joey had been a 6-to-4 favorite, his knockout victory stunned the jammed crowd. Joey hit Freddie so hard that his handlers had to carry him to his corner and revive him there. Freddie's legs were still buckling 10 minutes later, and he had to be assisted from the ring. Mills and Maxim provided an excellent fight for the record-breaking crowd that occupied every one of the 18,002 seats and practically every inch of standing room in Earl's Court. Some 15,000 had been turned away. (*Pic. Freddie Mills is down for the count*)



Realizing that he must knock out Maxim to keep his title, Mills forced the fighting in every round. And after the fifth, his efforts were so savage that he began to tire. Joey was warned for holding in the third and sixth rounds. Joey won the first and third rounds and fought on even terms in the second. Joey's left jabs and effective counterpunches won the next four rounds. They fought on even terms in the eighth and ninth.

The knockout came during a thrilling exchange in the 10<sup>th</sup>. Freddie, slightly behind on points, desperately tried to knock out the usually light-punching Maxim. He attacked savagely, missed with wild left hooks and rights as Joey bobbed under, and came up with a hard left uppercut to the chin. He followed with a left hook to the chin that knocked Freddie back onto his heels. Then Joey exploded a short straight right on Freddie's chin, and Freddie went sprawling backward to the canvas. He tried to rise at the count of six but fell forward and lay unconscious with his face in the ring resin.

After the fight, Mills said Maxim was the best light-heavy fighter he had ever fought. His manager, Ted Broadribb, called Joey the "best 175-pound fighter I've ever seen."

Joey campaigned the rest of the year against heavyweights, scoring knockouts over Joe Dawson in two rounds, old foe Bill Petersen in six rounds, Jackie Swanson in three rounds, and Dave Whitlock in four rounds. Only Bill Petersen in a rematch and Big Boy Brown went the distance.

### **NBA Heavyweight Title Challenge**

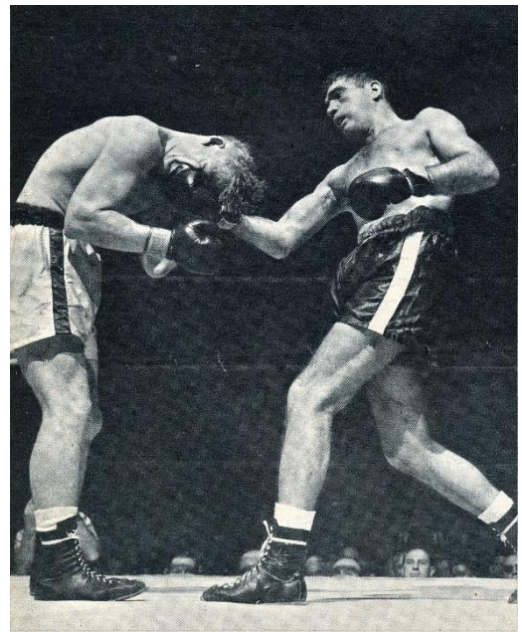
On January 27, 1951, Joey ran his unbeaten streak to twelve straight, eight by kayo, when he kayoed Herbert Hood in three rounds, earning a world heavyweight title fight against his old nemesis, NBA heavyweight champion Ezzard Charles in Chicago, Illinois, on May 30, 1951.

Joey's supporters anticipated a rousing battle because their three previous fights had been competitive, and their last bout had resulted in a split decision. However, Joey was hurt in the opening round and failed to get untracked. He was a wide-open target throughout, and Ezzard blasted him with an assortment of punches, but he gamely made it to the final bell. At the finish, Joey was an exhausted fighter. His right eye was swelling shut, and he was bleeding from a cut under the eye and above it. Ezzard was unmarked and breathing no harder than a brisk drill.

### **Irish Bob Murphy**

On August 22, 1951, Joey was set to defend his world light-heavyweight title against one of the hottest fighters in boxing, wild-swinging southpaw knockout artist Irish Bob Murphy (60-5-1, KOs 50). Murphy's 1951 victims included kayo and stoppage victories over Jake LaMotta, Dan Bucceroni, Danny Nardico, Henry Brimm, and Cecil Hudson.

Joey proved he was far from washed up by retaining his title with a one-sided decision over Irish Bob in Madison Square Garden. A 12-5 underdog, Joey survived a narrow escape in the first round when Irish Bob slammed him into the ropes with a smashing left hook and then came back to hand Murphy a boxing lesson. The rounds were all much alike. Joey would meet Irish Bob's wild charges with a left hook or left jab, followed by a right cross to the chin or head. Unable to hit Joey on the jaw, he concentrated mainly on a body attack. Murphy's right eye started to swell in the third round, half closed by the fifth and completely shut in the tenth. When the fifteenth was over, there was no doubt who won. Referee Ruby Goldstein scored it 10-3-2, and both judges had it 10-5. The Associated Press had Joey as the winner 11-4. *(Pic. Maxim lands a right uppercut)*



### **Ezzard Charles Wins Fifth Decision Over Joey**

In October 1951, Joey signed for a fight with Ezzard Charles scheduled for December 12, 1951, on the promise of the International Boxing Club (IBC) that the winner would get first crack at heavyweight champion "Jersey" Joe Walcott. Manager Jack Kearns stated, *"We're spending a lot of time and effort to make sure Joey is ready for Charles, and when he gets by that tough one, he'll punch Walcott's ears off."* Kearns revealed it will be a bigger and stronger Maxim facing Charles for the fifth time. *"Last time Joey fought Charles, he took the bout on short notice."*

Ezzard won his fifth decision over Joey in a 12-rounder at the San Francisco Cow Palace. Ezzard was the aggressor throughout and won a unanimous decision. He scored heavily with a looping right to the head and body and won at least seven rounds on the scorecards. Ezzard, 190 pounds, was stronger than Joey at

178 pounds and had much the better of the almost continuous infighting. Neither were staggered throughout the fight, although Ezzard pressed Joey to the ropes under flurries of lefts and rights on several occasions. Charles stated after the fight, "*Maxim's smart. You got to stay on him. He'll mucker out on you if you stay away from him. He rolls nice with a punch. I missed three good rights, but Maxim knew what was coming. We've fought often enough that maybe he knows the roll of my body when I'm shooting the right.*"

## Sugar Ray Robinson

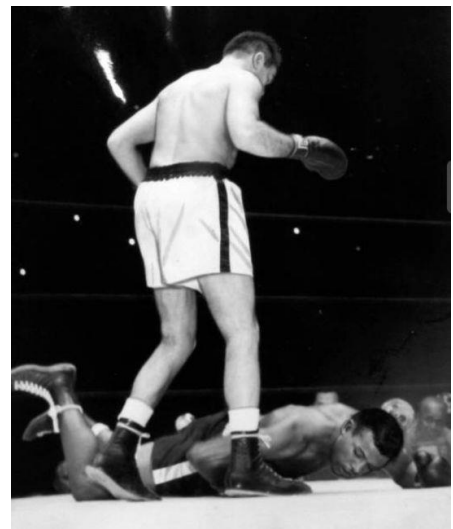
On March 6, 1952, Joey won a listless non-title ten-round decision over Tiger Ted Lowry in Minnesota. Shortly after, he signed to make the second defense of his world light heavyweight crown against Sugar Ray Robinson at Yankee Stadium on June 23, 1952.

A light rain on June 23 forced a two-day postponement. The fight could not be held on June 24 because the New York Giants were scheduled to play a night doubleheader with the Cincinnati Reds. By the time the fight took place on June 25, New York City was in the midst of a record 104-degree heat wave. The unprecedented heat helped cause the collapse of Sugar Ray and saved Joey's title when Ray was unable to answer the bell for the 14<sup>th</sup> round.

Weighing only 157 1/2 to Joey's 173, Sugar Ray used his speed to build up an insurmountable points lead. He danced into the attack and slipped away from Joey's jabs. Sugar Ray staggered Joey several times, particularly in the seventh and ninth rounds.

The heat was so terrific that it forced referee Ruby Goldstein to leave the ring at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> round and be replaced by referee Ray Miller. Goldstein was treated for heat prostration.

Sugar Ray appeared to wilt in the 12<sup>th</sup> round. In the 13<sup>th</sup>, he floundered about in near helplessness. Joey staggered him with two left hooks, then drove him through the ropes with a barrage of punches. In a final desperate attempt, Sugar Ray threw a wild right at Joey's head. The punch missed, and Ray fell face downward on the hot canvas. He rose quickly but lurched about the ring helplessly. Just before the bell, a left hook to the head sent him lurching sideways. He slumped onto the ropes in a neutral corner after the bell rang. His handlers rushed over and half-carried him to his corner. Referee Miller called Dr. Alexander Schiff into the ring, and Schiff advised Robinson he had enough, and Ray's handlers agreed. *(Pic. Robinson falls face down in 13<sup>th</sup>)*



## Archie Moore

Joey's next fight on December 12, 1952, saw him lose his title to Archie Moore in St. Louis. The cagey and hard-hitting veteran bullied Joey about the ring and repeatedly battered him on the ropes en route to a lop-sided decision. Joey made his best showings in the third and sixth rounds. However, in most of the other rounds, his attempts to keep Archie away with jabs proved futile. Archie weaved in constantly, bullying Joey toward the ropes. Every time they reached the ropes, Archie caught Joey with lefts and rights to the head and savage hooks to the body. Joey tried to fight him off at close quarters gamely but couldn't match Archie's constant pressure. Archie had him on rubber legs in the seventh, eighth, and tenth rounds. In the tenth



round, Joey suffered his worst beating. A right knocked him half over the top ring rope, and then he was battered but refused to go down. Referee Harry Kessler surprisingly scored the fight 76-74 for Archie, while the judges were more logical. Howard Hess scored it 82-68 for Moore, and Fred Connell favored Moore, 87-63. The UP favored Moore 12-2-1. And one of those two rounds was awarded to Joey by Kessler on a foul for low blows in the fourth round. Archie and his manager, Charles Johnston, said they would give Joey the return match if he wanted it. Joey said he certainly wanted it because he could do much better in a repeat performance.

On March 4, 1953, Joey took a tune-up fight against hard-hitting Danny Nardico, who had done the impossible months earlier, knocking down Jake LaMotta and stopping him in seven rounds. Joey gave Danny a boxing lesson but had to get off the floor from a seventh-round knockdown to win a unanimous decision.

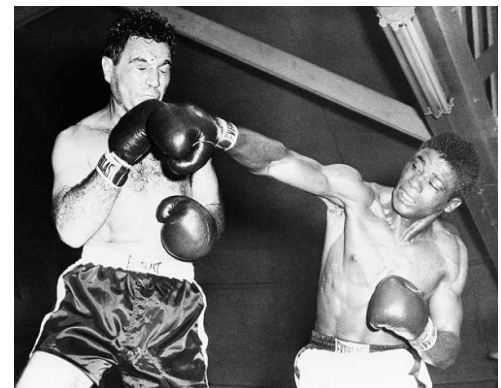
The return match with Archie Moore took place in Ogden, Utah, on June 24, 1953. Moore retained his title, but it was a close fight. Joey started strong and surprised the crowd and Archie with a fine right hand. But Archie began to pick up steam midway into the fight, and there was no real doubt about the outcome before the decision was announced. Referee Ray Miller scored the fight 7-5-2 for Moore. Judge Nat Fleicher had it 8-7 for Moore, and Judge Ken Shulsen had it 8-5-2. (*Pic. Moore vs Maxim June 24, 1953*)



Joey met Archie again for the title in Miami on January 27, 1954, and Archie left no doubt who was the better fighter by handing Joey a savage beating. Archie sent Joey to the canvas for a six-count in the eighth round and a seven-count in the 11<sup>th</sup>. He staggered Joey several times after but couldn't put him down again.

### The Last Hurrah

On June 7, 1954, Joey won a controversial unanimous eight-round decision over 19-year-old Floyd Patterson at the Eastern Parkway Arena in Brooklyn, New York. Joey's defensive moves, his occasional effective tactics of tying up the less experienced Patterson, and his ruggedness in continually bouncing back evidently caught the eyes of the officials. He was in superb condition to be able to take what he did. Referee Ruby Goldstein scored the fight 4-3-1, Judge Arthur Suskin (7-1) and Judge Joe Eppy (5-3). Ring reporter Gene Ward scored the fight for Patterson 6-2. (*Pic. Maxim vs Patterson*)



Next came number three-ranked light-heavyweight contender Paul Andrews in what turned out to be Joey's last great effort. This bout was supposed to set up Andrews for a possible title shot at champion Archie Moore. On November 24, 1954, at the Chicago Stadium, 32-year-old Joey handed 24-year-old Andrews his fourth defeat in 33 fights and added to his career by scoring his second straight victory as a "trial horse." Joey, his right eye puffed to closing in the very first round, outgamed and outmaneuvered Andrews in a demonstration of gameness and ring savvy. The 6 foot 3 Andrews seemingly needed just a little more time to finish Joey off as he pleased. But Joey called upon his vast ring resources. He feinted, weaved, and slugged away to thwart his younger opponent. Round after round, Paul tried to bull Joey into submission, but Joey always had enough artistry, enough sting in his punches to hold his own. Judge John Bray gave

Joey the widest margin, 99 to 93, while Referee Frank Sikora called it 98 to 96, and Judge James McManus, 96 to 95.

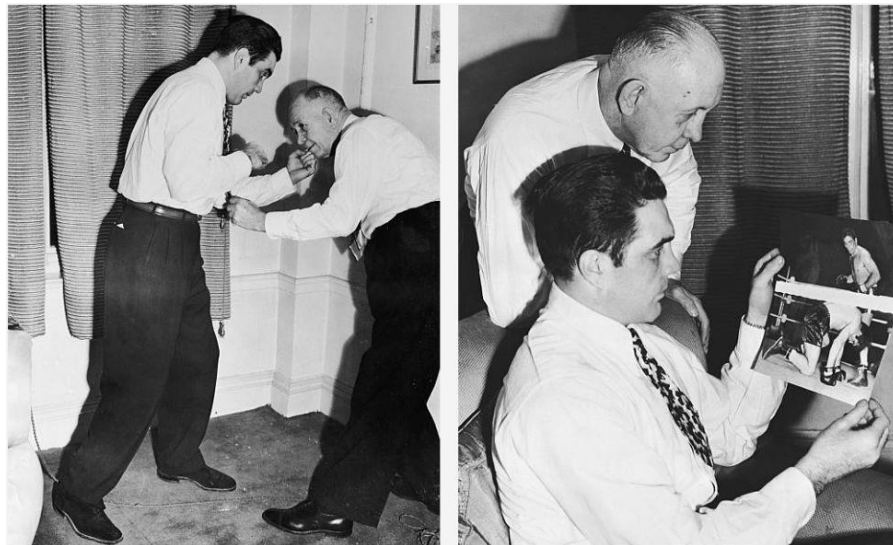
### The Twilight of His Career

In a perfect world, Joey would have retired after this fight. But he didn't. Joey needed the money and fought for four more years, losing eight of his nine remaining fights.

In 1955, he lost ten-round unanimous decisions to middleweight champion Carl "Bobo" Olson at the Cow Palace in California and 19-year-old Willie Pastrano at the Municipal Auditorium in New Orleans; in 1956, he won a ten-round unanimous decision over Argentina's Edgardo Romero at the Forum in Vancouver, British Columbia; in 1957 he lost back to back ten-round unanimous decisions to Eddie Machen in Miami Beach, Florida, and Louisville, Kentucky, and lost a split ten-round decision to Carl "Bobo" Olson in Portland, Oregon; in 1958, he lost ten-round decisions to Heinz Neuhaus in Stuttgart, Germany, Giacomo (Nino) Bozzano in Milan, Italy, and Ulli Ritter in Mannheim, Germany. Joey officially retired from boxing after the Ritter fight.

After retiring from boxing, Joey worked as a cab driver in Florida for several years before spending nearly 20 years as a greeter in Las Vegas hotels. Joey's wife, Michelina, with whom he had two daughters, died in 1977. He was inducted into the *Ring Boxing Hall of Fame* in 1975, the *World Boxing Hall of Fame* in 1988, and the *International Boxing Hall of Fame* in 1994.

In February 2001, Joey suffered a stroke and died in West Palm Beach, Florida, on June 2, 2001. In addition to his daughters, Charlene Bagnall and Maxine Murphy, he was survived by his mother, Henrietta Berardinelli, who was 97 years old and died in 2006 at age 101; six great-grandchildren; three brothers; and a sister.



(Pic. Joey Maxim and Jack (Doc) Kearns)

**Primary Sources:** *Ring Magazine*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Dayton Daily News*, *Akron Beacon*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Pittsburg Post Gazette*, *LA Times*, *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Salt Lake Utah Telegram*, *Tampa Times*, *Miami News*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and several online premium databases. I sincerely thank Roger Zotti for his insightful comments.