

MICHAEL CAPRIANO, BOXING TRAINER AND MANAGER, TAUGHT LAMOTTA

by
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Virtually everyone on the planet has heard of the "Raging Bull", Jake LaMotta, thanks to director Martin Scorsese's Academy Award winning film biography of the ex-middleweight champion's colorful life. But it is doubtful if anyone would have heard of LaMotta (and even more unlikely that Scorsese would have made a film about him) had it not been for a boxing trainer named Mike Capriano.

In 1938 a 17 year old LaMotta, fresh out of reform school, walked up the steps of the Teasdale Athletic Club in the Bronx and asked Capriano, the head boxing coach, to turn him into a professional fighter. Over the next six years Capriano polished a rough diamond and transformed LaMotta from crude amateur slugger to world renowned professional prizefighter.

Mike Capriano, who would have celebrated his 91st birthday in November, was New York's last living link to the city's golden age of boxing that spanned the 1920's to the 1950's. Only one of his contemporaries remains alive, the venerable Eddie Futch, who is 88 years old and hailed from the mid-west.

Young Jake was fortunate to have hooked up with one of the few trainers in the world capable of teaching him the difficult bend and weave style of fighting-an all but forgotten art today. It was a style perfectly suited to take full advantage of LaMotta's build, temperament and natural strength. Capriano had learned the style from a past master of the technique named Dave Shade, the great middleweight of the 1920's. Capriano first saw Shade use this style when he knocked out Jimmy Slattery on the undercard of the Harry Greb vs. Mickey Walker epic in 1925. Capriano asked Shade to teach him the style. Utilizing this unique form of attack and defense Capriano devised the strategy that enabled "The Bull" to hang the first defeat on the great Sugar Ray Robinson.

The combination of LaMotta and Capriano cut a swath through the middleweight and light heavyweight divisions in the early 1940's. Mike, who was also Jake's manager, was steering him toward a title shot when a bitter contractual dispute broke up their partnership. Most boxing historians agree that LaMotta was at his best during their association. Capriano was not in LaMotta's corner for his last three losing efforts against Robinson. But what LaMotta had learned during their six years together (1938-1944) was enough to carry him to the middleweight championship in 1949.

Mike was licensed as a manager and second by the New York State Athletic Commission for almost 60 years-longer than any other individual in the history of New York boxing. He was highly respected among his peers for his knowledge and depth of experience and

was still training fighters and climbing the ring steps as recently as 1994 until failing health ended his active participation. The last fighter he trained was David Telesco who is now a highly ranked light heavyweight contender.

Michael Capriano started out in boxing during the "roaring twenties" first as an amateur and professional fighter and then as a trainer. During the 1930's, as head coach of the Teasdale Athletic club in the Bronx, he developed hundreds of fighters and earned a reputation as one of New York's finest amateur trainers. Tami Mauriello, one of his many amateur champions, would later go on to challenge Joe Louis for the heavyweight title. LaMotta was the first of many outstanding professionals that Capriano both managed and trained in the 1940's. Others included middleweight Steve Riggio, featherweight contenders Harry LeSane and Pedro Biesca, lightweight Bobby Rosado and heavyweight Jimmy Carollo. In the 1970's he trained middleweight contender Kenny Bristol, welter Danny McAaloon, and lighthheavy Willie "The Bull" Taylor.

Michael Capriano was the last of his breed. He learned his trade at a time (1920's and 1930's) when there were up to thirty active professional fight arenas operating on a weekly basis in and around New York City. Unlike other trainers he never sought the limelight. Mike was content to teach a raw novice and develop him into a competent and well conditioned professional. Throughout his long career his reputation in boxing remained impeccable. The old "Bronx Bull" put it best when interviewed for an article in the Ring Magazine several years back: "Mike Capriano knew his business, he knew what he was doing", said LaMotta. "We accomplished a lot in the years we were together". His kind can never be replaced.

Michael Capriano is survived by his son Michael P. Capriano, an attorney in New York City, his grandchildren Jeanette Marie Kesten and Michael J. Capriano and great granddaughter Lindsay Kesten. Also surviving is a brother, Angelo, of California.. Michael Capriano's wife of 54 years, Matilda, passed away in 1982.