

The Final Round

BY MIKE MOSEDALE

It's a little after 4:00 p.m. on a weekday, and the regular afternoon workout at Glancey's Gym has yet to commence. The optional bull session, however, is already well under way. A half-dozen boxers, most still in their teens, drift through the doors into the dimly lighted office, where fight posters and faded newspaper clippings are pasted to the wall. Toting their gym bags and high hopes, the boxers cluster around the television, where a videotape of last year's St. Paul Golden Gloves Championship is playing.

"Look at that uppercut! Lands clean. Right in there," exclaims Allen Litzau. The tape shows Allen's younger brother, the lean and lanky Jason Litzau, artfully dominating and eventually stopping a stronger, more experienced local rival. Both Litzaus provide a spirited running narration of the action to anyone who will listen. "I threw some punches, didn't I!" Jason boasts.

The three rounds of glory relived, the

conversation turns to other fistic matters, with the brothers Litzau letting loose a stream of unedited opinions: the limitations of a certain young professional boxer from St. Paul (he can't throw combinations); the quality of the training at a certain rival gym (they don't teach defense); the heart of fighters from different ethnic groups (Mexicans have a lot); and so on.

Peering through his thick wire-framed glasses, Jim Glancey, the gym's proprietor, listens wordlessly until Jason shifts topics and declares his interest in getting a job. "Yay!" Glancey hollers, clapping his hands in applause. Glancey, who is 75, evinces a grandfatherly fondness for Allen and Jason, who are 20 and 18, respectively. "They're good kids. Aggressive, but in a pleasant way. They fit in wherever I take them," he says. "And they're clean. No drinking. No smoking. They do swear on occasion, but not around me."

The Litzaus have been boxing out of Glancey's for nearly a decade—and for the past year, they've been living in a backroom at the gym. But come May 10, the Litzaus

THE LAST BELL RINGS FOR GLANCEY'S BOXING GYM

From: Jim Amato

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Michael Dunneak for City Pages

Admirers of gym proprietor Jim Glancey say he was "in it for the kids"

and some 50 other aspiring boxers who workout at Glancey's will need to find another place to ply their craft. Earlier this month, Glancey sealed a deal to sell the cavernous, 14,000-square-foot building at the corner of Beech and Forest streets on St. Paul's rough-and-tumble East Side.

Word of Glancey's imminent closing spread quickly around St. Paul's small fight community. Since its doors opened in 1992, the gym has acquired a reputation as a top training ground for amateur fighters. The Litzaus are the best known. Both have won national Silver Gloves titles (a competition for fighters under 16), and Glancey thinks Jason has Olympic potential. But there have been scads of other accomplished amateurs to come out of the gym, including four-time Upper Midwest Golden Gloves champ Leo Moreno.

"I was saddened to hear that Glancey's was closing. The impact will be great," says George Blair, a boxing writer and historian who works out of St. Paul and occasionally contributes to Glancey's idiosyncratic, bi-weekly boxing newsletter, *Winners Never Quit*. "Jim is an upstanding gentleman. There aren't too many in boxing like him. He was in it for the kids. He never had much interest in the professional side of the game, so there was never that sleaze element."

Donnie Evans, a former member of the now-defunct state boxing commission, agrees: "He's done wonders with the kids. He could be pretty strict. Sometimes fighters have the idea that they can act like Mike Tyson, and he'd teach them real quick that wasn't the case. Of course, he used to be a thirsty guy, too, when he was young."

In fact, it was Glancey's drinking—or, more precisely, his quitting drinking—that led him into the boxing business. Growing up in St. Paul, Glancey boxed some as an amateur. But he drifted away from the sport in his 20s. After a stint in the navy during World War II, he went to college on the GI Bill, married, had two daughters, and found work as a pipe insulator. And he drank. Thirty-two years ago, he found Alcoholics Anonymous. He also started hanging around boxing gyms, volunteering in any way he could. Mostly, he says, he took pictures, which he would then compile into albums and present to young fighters as mementos.

"Wherever there was a fight, I would go. Sometimes I would drive three, four hours to see a fight, drive back, and go to work in the morning. It just consumed me," he says. "That's the way it is with addiction. You turn from one to another. Boxing and AA—that was my life." Glancey's devotion to the sweet science took a toll on his family life, and he and his wife split 20 years ago. "One of my daughters said, 'Dad, why don't you leave? You upset mother.' That's all I needed to hear."

After retiring from his job as a pipe insulator at the University of Minnesota, Glancey decided to open his own gym. In part, the decision was driven by his perception that other gym proprietors were too permissive with their young charges. "I didn't like all the swearing and smoking that was going on in some of the gyms," he says. "There were occasions where I've seen other coaches buy kids cases of beer after tournaments, let them drink it in their hotel rooms. I didn't want to have nothing to do with that."

In 1991 Glancey learned that the former Anderson Meat Company building was for sale. With ample space, and an apartment upstairs, the imposing old brick structure seemed ideal for a boxing gym. Only later did Glancey learn of the building's strange connection to Minnesota boxing lore: In 1983 a former Golden Gloves champ named Clyde Mudgett perished in the chimney in the course of an attempted burglary (see www.citypages.com/archive).

After pouring some \$50,000 into renovating the building, Glancey opened the doors in 1992. "I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life here," Glancey says. "But I just need a break. I need to catch my breath. Boxing takes too much time. I'd like to see some movies. See some plays. Travel a little bit. Maybe take some of the kids over to Ireland to fight."

Still, he doesn't rule out the possibility that he might open a new gym in another location in a year or two. "I don't like to hang around old people," he explains. "They kind of wear me out, with their aches and pains and talking about Arizona. Me, I like to stay active." □

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