

Jackie Keough, 76, West Side boxer

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Plain Dealer Reporter

LAKESWOOD — Young boxers didn't mess with Jackie Keough, the soft-spoken white-haired referee with the twinkling blue eyes, viselike grip and flattened nose that testified to his own career in the ring.



Keough, the 1947 national Golden Gloves welterweight boxing champion, once was one bout from a professional middleweight title match with the legendary Sugar Ray Robinson. He was a celebrated character in Cleveland's West Side Irish boxing lore.

The 76-year-old Lakewood resident died Tuesday at the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky. He had Alzheimer's disease.

"Jack was as tough as they come but also a gentle soul," said Joe Maxse, Plain Dealer boxing writer. "It always helped to be on his good side, because Jack knew how to take care of himself. He was a respected, kind man."

Keough relied on brains rather than brawn when he competed in the ring. He began fighting in the amateur ranks as a teenager in the early 1940s. He boxed professionally from September 1947 to January 1954 and logged a record of 25-15-2, which included a single knockout.

"I wasn't the greatest puncher. You can tell that from my knockout record," he told Maxse in 1987. "But I always trained well and was able to size up my opponent. There were a lot of guys tougher than me. But



Jack Keough was the 1947 national Golden Gloves welterweight boxing champion and a celebrated character in Cleveland's West Side Irish boxing lore.

I was a boxer first."

In front of 50,000 fans in London in 1951, Keough battled Randy Turpin until losing the fight by a seventh-round technical knockout. A month later, Turpin stunned the legendary Sugar Ray Robinson, winning the middleweight title in a 15-round decision.

After retiring from competition, Keough remained a key figure in the ring. He became one of the most active referees for amateur and pro bouts in Ohio. In 1975, he was a ringside judge at the Muhammad Ali-Chuck Wepner heavyweight title fight at the old Coliseum in Richfield.

He also worked with youngsters training at the Clark Recreation Center.

He was inducted into the Greater Cleveland Sports Hall of Fame and belonged to Ohio State Former Boxers and Associates.

John M. Keough, a Cleveland native, began his pugilistic training at an early age at the Angle Gym, which his father ran on West 25th Street.

He attended West Technical High School and won the Golden Gloves Northeastern Ohio welterweight title in 1944, before he served in World War II as a Navy torpedo man on a PT boat in the Pacific.

Keough began working on Lake Erie ore boats before becoming a prizefighter. He retired in 1989 from a management position with the Great Lakes Dredge & Dock Co. in the Flats, where he had worked for 42 years.

Survivors include his wife of 49 years, Peggy; sons, Mike of Columbus, John of Napierville, Ill., and Martin of Lakewood; daughters, Colleen Madden of Jacksonville, Fla., Kathleen of Cleveland, Eileen Vargo of Middleburg Heights and Christine Cihon of Columbus; six grandchildren, and two sisters.

Services will be at 11 a.m. tomorrow at St. Mark Catholic Church, 15800 Montrose Ave., Cleveland.

Donations may be made to St. Patrick Catholic Church Restoration Fund, 3602 Bridge Ave., Cleveland 44113, or the Ohio Veterans Home, 3416 Columbus Ave., Sandusky 44870.

Arrangements are by McGorray Bros. Funeral Home of Westlake.

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