

Mando Ramos: The Youngest Lightweight Champ

by Rick Farris

In 1965, promoters Cal & Aileen Eaton began promoting weekly televised boxing shows from the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. L.A. was loaded with boxing talent and the Eatons would parlay this talent into the most successful weekly boxing promotion in the world.

The Eatons hired veteran boxing figure Mickey Davies as matchmaker and Jimmy Lennon Sr. (The Voice of the Olympic Auditorium) was the ring announcer. The fights were televised every Thursday night on KTLA channel 5 from 8-to-10 pm. with matchmaker Davies and a young Dick Enberg calling the action from ringside. It was a winning combination. However, it was the boxers that made "Boxing from the Olympic" the highest rated local TV production in Southern California.

A few months after things got started Cal Eaton passed away, leaving his widow Aileen with the responsibility of running the show. Aileen was not to be underestimated and she had no difficulty dealing in the tough world of professional boxing. To the managers she was known as a tough businesswoman and was nicknamed "Dragon Lady". However, she was like a mother to the boxers.

Eaton had the connections and resources to bring top name talent to Los Angeles to headline her boxing cards and often did so. However, she was also aware of the potential of local talent and focused her business on the development of these young fighters. For the next decade Aileen Eaton would help build the careers of many exceptional boxers and several would go on to win world championships.

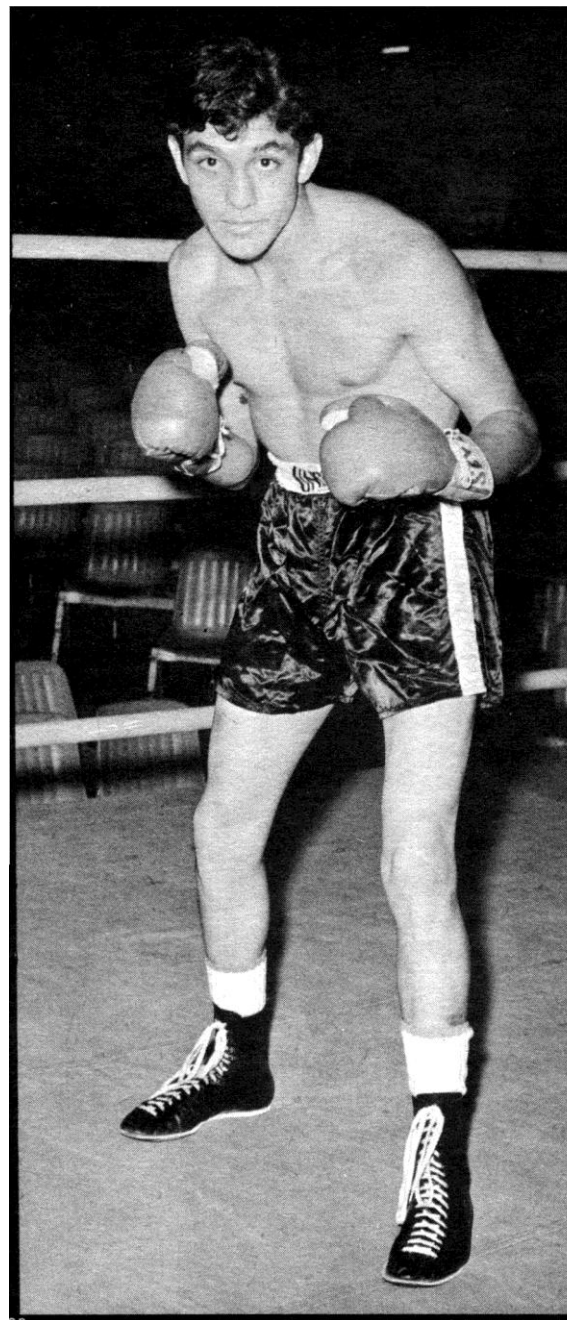
The first World Champion to come from this group was one of the most exciting and charismatic to ever step into the ring at the 18th & Grand arena.

His name was Armando Ramos. Mando would become the youngest man to ever win the World Lightweight Championship.

Mando Ramos was a boxing prodigy. His father Ray Ramos had been a boxer and he taught his sons Junior and Mando how to box shortly after they had started walking. When Junior began boxing as an amateur Mando would follow his older brother to the gym. By the age of eight, Mando was competing in Jr. Golden Gloves tournaments in Los Angeles.

By the time Junior turned professional Mando was already gaining a rep at the gym. The tall, skinny teenager was outboxing a lot of pros and his punching power was no secret.

Mando Ramos had a gift, but he also had a curse. The gift Mando had would take him to the top



of the world in boxing. However, the curse would take it all away from him before he ever had a chance to reach his prime as a boxer.

In the evening, Mando would work in his grandmother's Mexican restaurant washing dishes. He became friendly with the restaurant's bartender and this gave Mando access to all the booze he could want. It was the 60's and Mando was also known to indulge in other methods of getting high. Even so, Ramos was outclassing professional boxers in gym workouts and Junior decided it was time to hook his brother up with a top trainer.

Junior Ramos contacted Jackie McCoy, a former bantamweight contender who had fought Manuel Ortiz in the late 40's. McCoy was one of the best manager/trainers in boxing and had helped guide

Don Jordan to the welterweight title in the late 50's. McCoy had heard of the kid but wanted to see for himself. What he saw convinced him that Mando Ramos was something special.

McCoy had a featherweight scheduled to fight in a main event the following week and he put the 16-year-old Ramos in with his boxer for a sparring match. Ramos knocked McCoy's fighter out in the opening round. McCoy was excited about what he saw and called his partner, Lee Praila, and told him to meet him at the gym the next day to discuss future plans for their new prospect.

McCoy went to work and fine tuned Ramos' natural talent, molding him into a boxer that was too good for the amateurs in Los Angeles, or anywhere else for that matter. Amateur boxers would not fight Mando and it was decided that in the best interest of Ramos he should turn professional. McCoy wanted Mando to concentrate on boxing and keep him away from the bad influence of his friends.

However, there was one problem. The California State Athletic Commission required a boxer to be 18-years-old to get a professional boxing license. Mando wasn't yet seventeen. McCoy feared that with no amateur competition, Ramos' career might succumb to his love of women and the party scene before it ever had a chance to get off the ground.

McCoy had a long talk with Mando and the skinny teenager promised to buckle down and work if given the opportunity to fight pro. With the help of a phony birth certificate, Mando Ramos made his professional boxing debut just two days after his 17th birthday.

Armando Ramos had his first pro fight at the Olympic Auditorium on November 17, 1965. In a one-sided match Ramos won a unanimous four round decision over Berlin Roberts. Two weeks later he KO'ed tough Chuey Loera in the second round and the fans were already taking notice of the talented kid from Long Beach. Ramos was nearly 5'10" and weighed 126 pounds. He was also strikingly handsome and became a favorite of the Los Angeles boxing fans watching in person or on TV.

Ramos had only been seen in two pro fights but Aileen Eaton was already getting letters from fans requesting to see more of this kid. Mando would start 1966 with three consecutive knockouts followed by a unanimous decision over Bosco Basileo in a six rounder.

Ramos was 6-0 with 4 knockouts when McCoy and Eaton decided to put him in his first ten round main event. His opponent would be a tough veteran named Joey Aquilar. The Olympic Auditorium, which held nearly 11,000 fans, was packed for Ramos' main event debut which was being broadcast live on television. Everybody thought that Ramos was amazing for an 18-year-old and had no idea that he was only seventeen. Ramos battered Aquilar, knocking the tough Mexican down three



times before referee George Latka stopped the fight in the eighth round. A star was born.

Two weeks later Ramos headlined again at the Olympic and knocked out Ray Coleman in the 6th round. Two weeks later he iced Manny Linson in two rounds. By the end of 1966 Ramos was 14-0 (10 KO's) and ready to take another step up the ladder in the featherweight division.

Ramos was now an established main eventer and could sell out the Olympic within a few days of announcing that he was scheduled to fight. Eaton would no longer televise Ramos' fights. Mando's fights would now follow a televised ten rounder and if you wanted to see Ramos fight you would have to drive down to the Olympic and buy a ticket. And this is exactly what people did.

Mando quickly became one of the biggest box-office attractions in the history of Los Angeles boxing. His popularity was being compared with L.A.'s last box office Golden Boy, Art Aragon from the 50's. It was about this time that the press discovered that L.A.'s newest Golden Boy had only just turned eighteen, making his success even more incredible.

Two months after Mando's 18th birthday he packed the Olympic Auditorium when he took on his first world rated opponent, unbeaten Ray Echevarria. Echevarria was the California Featherweight Champion and rated among the top ten featherweights in the world by the Ring Magazine.

Ramos out boxed, out punched and completely out fought the tough Echevarria, winning a unanimous ten round decision. Two months later Ramos would face another tough test in veteran Pete Gonzales, whom had beaten some of the best in the world and was also rated in the top ten by The Ring. Ramos again showed his stuff and won a unanimous ten round decision over Gonzales.

Mando was growing and could no longer make 126 pounds. In his next bout he would move up into the jr. lightweight class and take on unbeaten Len Kesey of Eugene, Oregon. Ramos easily knocked out Kesey in the fifth round with a brutal left hook to the liver. Now 17-0 (11 KO's) Ramos would face his biggest test to date in Korea's Suh Kang-IL.

Less than twenty months after his pro debut Ramos was eighteen years old and getting rich. everybody wanted to be close to Mando and he loved the attention, not to mention the women. It was no secret that Mando was keeping late hours and McCoy was upset. The fight with Suh Kang IL was scheduled just two weeks after Ramos' KO of Len Kesey and Mando was confident. So confident that he missed several workouts prior to the match and showed up at the gym once with a hangover.

Suh Kang IL held victories over two world champions and on July 6, 1967 he handed Mando Ramos his first loss as a professional. Two nights before the fight, Ramos had gotten so wasted at a 4th of July party that he was arrested for drunk driving on the way home. L.A.'s newest Golden Boy was no longer unbeaten.



The following month McCoy took Ramos to Sacramento where he KO'ed Alex Luna in two. Ramos returned to L.A. and a few weeks later knocked out Eliseo Estrada in five. Mando was growing into a lightweight but before getting much bigger, fans in Los Angeles were begging to see him fight another hot featherweight making a name for himself at the Olympic, "Irish" Frankie Crawford.

Crawford and Ramos were not strangers, as both worked out at the Jake Shugrue Gym near 78th & Hoover in South Central Los Angeles. they had started their pro careers within months of each other

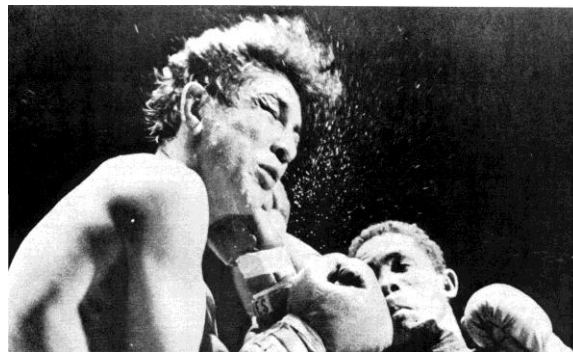
and were similar in build. Like Ramos, Crawford was a tall featherweight at 5'9" and was a knockout puncher. Another thing the two boxers had in common was natural ability and poor training habits. In later years they would become stablemates when McCoy took over management of Crawford's career and the two fighters became friends. However, on October 5, 1967 the two brought no friendship into the Olympic Auditorium ring when the two met for the first of two great fights.

Mando had about an inch in height on Crawford and at the weigh-in came in nine pounds heavier, which is quite an advantage to a guy under 130 pounds. Before a sellout crowd of 10,500 fans, Frankie Crawford stepped on Ramos' toes, hit him low, thumbed him and opened cuts with head butts and elbows. I knew Crawford well and can guarantee you that Fritzie Zivic and Ace Hudkins had nothing on Frankie when it came to dirty fighting. However, Crawford beat him legit. It was Crawford who entered the ring in better shape and who scored an upset decision victory over Ramos. I remember that Frankie had exhausted himself so much fighting the heavier Ramos, he was given oxygen in the dressing room after the match.

Ramos had lost for the second time in three months and this was a loss that Mando would have to avenge or forever hold his peace. Mando turned nineteen a month after losing to Crawford and three months later, on February 1, 1968 he'd meet Crawford again in a rematch. Mando entered the ring in shape this time and won a unanimous decision over Crawford. Mando Ramos was now ready to get back on the road that would lead him to a world title.

A few months after beating Crawford, Ramos would score his biggest win to date by defeating World Jr. Lightweight champ Hiroshi Kobayashi of Japan in a ten round non-title fight. Ramos beat Kobayashi easily and as a result was rated the number one lightweight in the world by The Ring Magazine.

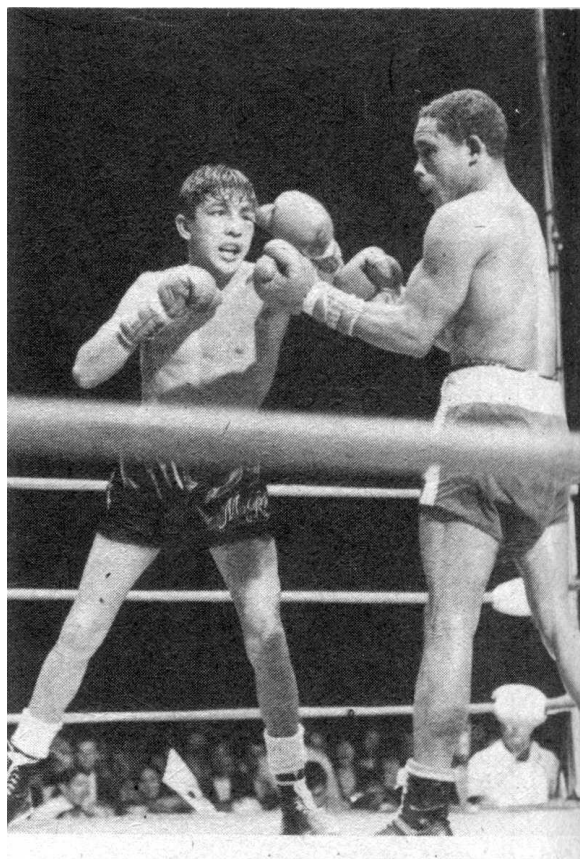
Ramos was 19-years-old and in his next fight would face Carlos "Teo" Cruz for the World Lightweight Championship. If Ramos could beat Cruz he'd not only be the youngest boxer ever to win the lightweight title, but would do so as a teenager. Cruz was a clever champion from the Dominican Republic who had won the title by defeating a great



champion in Carlos Ortiz. Ramos trained hard for Cruz and I remember that Aileen Eaton would need more room to hold the fight than at the 10,500 seat Olympic Auditorium or the 15,000 seat Los Angeles Sports Arena. Eaton held the Cruz-Ramos lightweight title fight at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum along with a World Featherweight Championship bout between Ramos' stablemate, WBA Featherweight Champ Raul Rojas and challenger Sho Saijyo.

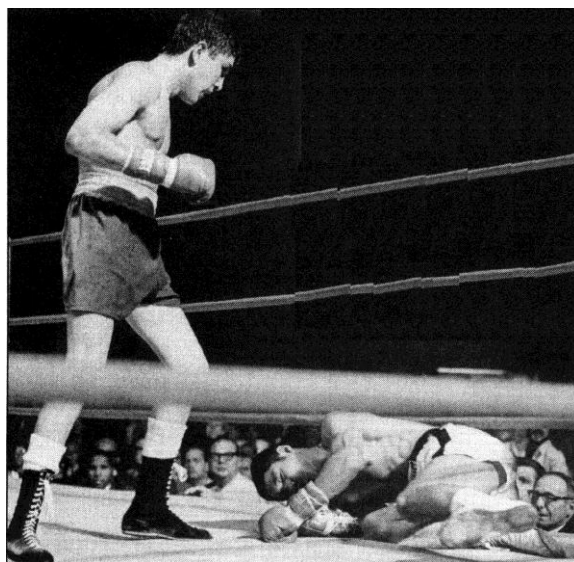
Cruz opened cuts over both of Ramos' eyes and won a close decision after fifteen rounds, but it was obvious that Mando could beat Cruz. McCoy refused to let Ramos rest and wanted to keep him active. Mando had fought Cruz on even terms throughout much of the fight and Aileen Eaton signed Cruz to give Ramos a second shot at the title four months later.

After scoring KO's in two tune-up matches, Ramos challenged Cruz once again for the lightweight title on February 18, 1969. This time it was Ramos who battered Cruz and opened cuts over both eyes of the champion. Referee John Thomas, on the advice of ringside physician Dr. Bernard

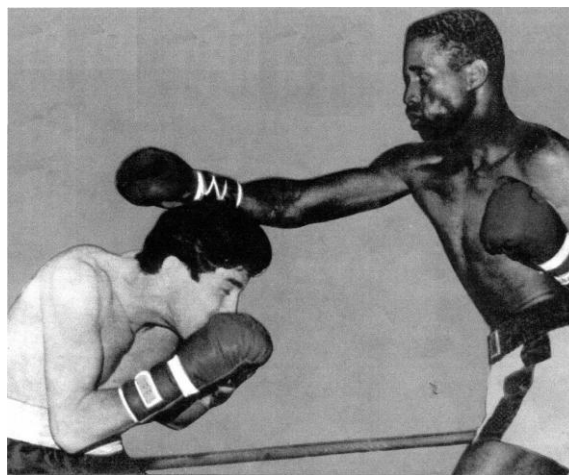


Schwartz, stopped the bout in the eleventh round. Three months after his 20th birthday, Armando Ramos became the youngest boxer in history to win the World Lightweight Championship.

Three months after winning the title Ramos KO'ed little known Jerry Graci in a non-title fight in Hawaii. He then returned to Los Angeles for the first defense of his title, knocking out newly crowned Jr. Lightweight Champ Yoshiaki Numata of Japan in the seventh round at the L.A. Sports Arena.



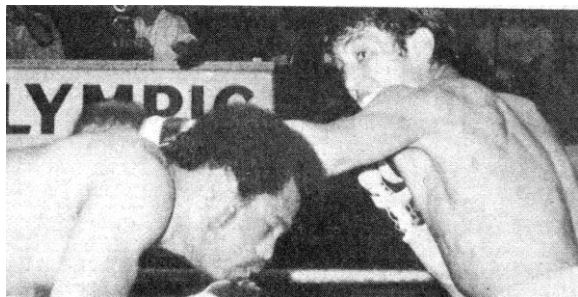
On March 3, 1970, Ramos would defend his title for the second time against former Lightweight Champ Ismael Laguna of Panama. During the five months between his first title defense against Numata and the Laguna fight, Ramos had enjoyed all the perks of being a world champion. It was obvious from the opening round that Mando Ramos was not ready for the skilled Panamanian. By the ninth round Mando was cut to ribbons and bleeding from cuts over both eyes. On the advice of ringside physician Dr. Bernard Schwartz, referee Larry Rozadilla stopped the fight. Laguna had taken the title from Ramos just over a year later he had won it.



At the age of 21, Ramos had already won and lost the Lightweight Championship. It would be more than five months before Ramos would step into the ring again, and when he did, he faced former Featherweight Champ Sugar Ramos. Sugar Ramos

had been fighting in the lightweight division since losing the featherweight title to Vicente Saldivar six years previous.

Ramos and Ramos engaged in one of the bloodiest battles I have ever seen. In the end it was Mando's fight but he left the ring with major cuts over both eyes. A couple of weeks later he underwent plastic surgery to remove the scar tissue in hopes that it would prolong his ring career.



After giving his skin four months to heal, Ramos would engage in a fight that was as important to him personally as it was professionally. He would be matched with his former stablemate Raul Rojas. Rojas was the former WBA Featherweight & Jr. Lightweight Champion and his criticism of Ramos was making headlines in Los Angeles sports pages. Mando trained harder than ever for this match.

On December 10, 1970 Ramos and Rojas would fight before a sellout crowd at the Olympic Auditorium. The match would be the highlight of an all-star card that also featured Frankie Crawford, welterweight prospect Armando Muniz and myself in a six round TV prelim.

I remember the weigh-in for this fight. It was at 11am. on the day of the match (today weigh-ins are held the night before a fight). All of the boxers were weighed-in on a scale set up inside the ring at the Olympic Auditorium. Frankie Crawford stepped onto the scale right after I was weighed and as we left the ring I asked Frankie about Mando's conditioning. Crawford said he's never seen Mando in better shape and that he was going to destroy Rojas.

That night I opened the show with a unanimous decision win over Antonio Villanueva. In the next bout Armando Muniz remained unbeaten with a KO win. In the televised main event Frankie Crawford knocked out Jose Luis Martinez with a late blow that landed a second after the final bell. After Crawford's controversial win, Ramos and Rojas entered the ring.

The odds favored Ramos slightly but Rojas was a tough former world champ and there was bad blood between the two. In the sixth round, Ramos caught Rojas with a solid left hook flush on the jaw that put his former stablemate to sleep. Referee Dick Young didn't even bother to count.

Ismael Laguna had lost his lightweight championship to Ken Buchanan of Scotland. After

Ramos KO'ed Rojas promoter Aileen Eaton signed Buchanan to defend his title against Ramos. The bout was scheduled for the Los Angeles Sports arena on February 12, 1971. I was also signed to fight on the undercard of the Buchanan-Ramos fight and would serve as a Buchanan sparring partner briefly. Less than a week prior to the fight Ramos pulled out claiming to have been injured in the gym. This would cost promoter Aileen Eaton a great deal of money and she was fortunate to get my stablemate Ruben Navarro to substitute for Ramos. Navarro was training for a fight the following month with Jimmy Robertson and was not quite in condition for a fifteen rounder. However, Navarro ended up flooring Buchanan before losing a close decision.

This was not the first time that Ramos had pulled out of an important match claiming to be injured or sick. Mando's problem had nothing to do with injury, it had to do with heroin addiction. Mando's party habits had taken control of his life was destroying his career.

Mando didn't fight again for another nine months and when he did I appeared on the undercard of that match as well. It was September 30, 1971 and Ramos would face my stablemate Ruben Navarro at the Olympic Auditorium. The winner of this match was guaranteed a shot at the vacant WBC Lightweight Championship against Spain's Pedro Carrasco.

Mando had his hands full with Navarro and at the end of ten rounds the crowd was aware that Navarro had beaten Ramos. However, the judges saw it different and awarded Ramos a narrow split decision win.

Two months later Ramos would fight Carrasco in Spain for the WBC title but end up losing on disqualification in the 12th round after beating the Spanish fighter handily. Three months later a rematch would be held in Los Angeles and Ramos would win the title via a unanimous fifteen round decision. Mando had trained very hard for this match and looked the best I had seen him since flattening Raul Rojas.



I remember driving Frankie Crawford to Mando's apartment in Belmont Shores a few weeks before this fight. Crawford and I had stopped in to

visit Mando and the former champ was really focused. On the door to his refrigerator he had a photo of Carrasco set in the middle of a target. Mando's focus paid off and Mando was once again a World Champion.

Ramos would defeat Carrasco a second time four months later and then signed to defend his title against Mexican Lightweight Champ Chango Carmona.



Between the last Carrasco fight and the Carmona fight, Ramos had fallen back on his old ways. After Ramos had pulled out of the Buchanan match the previous year, Aileen Eaton had a clause inserted into any contract with Ramos stating that if he were to pull out of the match for any reason he would be liable for a minimum of \$50,000. to Eaton.

Less than a week before the Carmona match, Ramos was found early one morning laying half naked in the sand near his Belmont shores apartment. Mando had overdosed on heroin. the press never got word of this and I only heard it through mutual friends. Mando Ramos was truly sick, however, he would have to honor his contract and go through with the fight.

On September 15, 1972, Mando Ramos lost the WBC Lightweight Championship at the Los Angeles Coliseum and nearly lost his life. Carmona battered Ramos before knocking him out in the eighth round. Ramos could not make it to his feet following the knockout and had to be taken from the ring in a stretcher. The magic career of Mando Ramos was history.



It would be nearly a year before Ramos would fight again and when he did he was knocked out by Turi Pineda, a fighter that would not have lasted three rounds with Ramos in the past.

In 1974 Ramos headed to Germany where he won three fights in two weeks, before being KO'ed twice by Wolfgang Gans, a second rate German welterweight. He then went to Las Vegas where he was granted a license and lost a ten rounder to a prelim fighter with a losing record. After scoring a couple of close victories Mando Ramos fought Wayne Beale in what would be his last professional fight. Beale had a losing record and was somebody I had beaten easily a few years previous as an amateur. Beale knocked out Ramos in the second round.

Mando disappeared from sight for some time. Every once in awhile I would hear something about Ramos and it was never good. I was told he was strung out pretty bad and was homeless. I also heard that Mando's older brother Junior had died from a heroin overdose.

Then one day I heard that Mando had found himself and had been able to put together some clean time. He was said to be working in San Pedro as a long shoreman and had organized a youth boxing program called "B.A.A.D." - Boxers & Athletes Against Drugs.

About this time four years ago I was working as a lighting technician on the film "CON AIR". One day Carlos Palomino had come to visit some friends of his that were working on the set. I recognized Carlos and noticed that he had brought a friend with him. I didn't recognize the friend but there was something very familiar about him. I could tell the guy had been a fighter and noticed the guy was staring at me. In fact, I was staring at him and it appeared as if he were trying to remember my face. I finally got a chance to break away from my work and went over to say Hi to Carlos. As Palomino and I shook hands his friend stands up and extends his hand to me. He said "Hi, I'm Mando Ramos".

I would have never recognized Mando. He looked great but was a lot heavier than he used to be and had a mustache. I said "Mando, I'm Rick Farris . . . I didn't recognize you". We both began to laugh and tell old stories. We talked about the Olympic and our old friend Frankie Crawford who had died in the early 80's. Seeing Ramos made my day. What really made me happy was hearing that he had been clean & sober for more than a dozen years. He was happily married and life was in session again for Mando Ramos. Around his neck he had a gold chain with the letters "MR. BADD" inscribed on a charm. Mando told me that his young boxers had presented it to him as a Christmas present the previous year in recognition of his program.

During the time Mando and Palomino were on the set, I watched people walk up to Carlos and introduce him as the former Welterweight champ. Carlos had done work in the film industry and was well known. I was shocked that nobody even looked at Ramos until Palomino and I told people who it was. Suddenly, Mando Ramos fans appeared from everywhere. People would walk onto the set from

other stages after hearing that Mando Ramos was on the lot. If I was unable to recognize Ramos after all the years it's understandable why other didn't either. But once they found out who it was he was the most popular thing on stage, more so than Palomino or Nicolas Cage.

That was the Mando Ramos I remember. Mando's career is long down the road but I have to tell you he still has that charisma. Mando Ramos has come off the canvas and proven himself a champion in life.

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MORE RAMOS PHOTOS

