

Into the Hall: Rich Giachetti

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Richie Giachetti grew up in a close-knit Italian family in Uniontown before becoming one of the most well-known names in the boxing world who trained a heavyweight champion.

Giachetti, who died in 2016, was a 1958 North Union graduate who played football and baseball in high school but eventually got into the sport of boxing. He fared well in the ring, forging an 85-10 record and winning the welterweight division of the Cleveland Golden Gloves in 1962.

He made it even bigger as a trainer, most notably with Esteban DeJesus, a Puerto Rican world lightweight champion in the 1970s, and Larry Holmes, who was the heavyweight champion of the world from 1978-85.

Giachetti is part of the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2023.

Giachetti's son, Rick Giachetti, will represent his father at the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies on June 16 at Pleasant Valley Golf Club.

"It pleased me," Rick said of his reaction upon hearing about his father's upcoming enshrinement. "Over the years my dad's popularity, he's pretty well known throughout the boxing community. My dad was never a kind of guy that looked for the media, to be hyped up. He just wanted to be acknowledged for his accomplishments. His legacy lived on and it's really pleasing to the family that he's being acknowledged."

Giachetti was a no-nonsense, straight shooter, according to his son.

"He was the kind of guy, he didn't sugarcoat anything," Rick said. "He told it like it was. When he stood for something he stood his ground foolheartedly."

Giachetti and his brother started turning up on boxing cards in Fayette County and fought for Shaffer's Boys Club and kept improving.

"He told me when he came to Cleveland that him and my Uncle Bob fought in the 'Gloves' and they won and they were pretty predominant in his division," Rick said.

Getting married, raising a family and an automobile accident put an end to Giachetti's boxing career.

In 1963 he was injured in a car accident on his way from work and went through the windshield, suffering a concussion. His doctor advised him not to box any more so he began training his brother Bob among other boxers.

“He had the opportunity to get into training,” Rick said. “He never really stopped. He worked with my Uncle Bob and a couple other fighters on the side which kept him involved.

“I grew up in the gym. Rocky Marciano’s gym was one of my dad’s main staple gyms that he’d train fighters at. I did a lot of local shows and when I was in my teens I was able to travel with him and go to Atlantic City, Philadelphia.

“I was kind of like his extension in some areas. I had the opportunity to work a couple times in the corner with him, which were great memories. When he talked to the fighters I would watch.”

Giachetti built an outstanding reputation as a trainer which eventually led him to Holmes, and a bond was created between the two.

“From the time that he got with Larry, my dad, when they weren’t in the ring, they hung out,” Rick said. “Larry actually even stayed at our house at times. He mentored him. Larry respected him. When the got in the gym it was all about business. That’s the relationship he had with a lot of his fighters.”

The two got together by chance.

“He was training Ernie Shavers and they went to Michigan to Muhammad Ali’s training camp and that’s when he saw Larry Holmes,” Rick said. “He said, ‘I like the kid. He’s got a great jab and I think I can make him a world champion.’ He bought his contract and became his manager and trainer.

“In 1978 he made his dream come true.”

Holmes won a 15-round decision over Ken Norton to become the heavyweight champion of the world.

Despite their accomplishments, Rick didn’t feel Holmes or his father received as much recognition as they should have.

“Coming out of the shadows of some of the older fighters and Muhammad Ali, he wasn’t that glamorous fighter. He wasn’t as recognizable,” Rick said of Holmes. “Today they look at his record. He had one of the best jabs in the business to this day. Unfortunately, it was just the era.

“Larry even did a quote about my father, saying my dad isn’t world recognized, like he should be in the boxing hall of fame, because he came in the same era. Like Angelo Dundee for Muhammad Ali, those were household names. My dad wasn’t a household name because he wasn’t a media kind of interview guy.”

Giachetti also trained Aaron Pryor, Greg Page and two-time world cruiserweight champion Jean Marc Mormeck.

He also trained Mike Tyson.

“My dad trained Buster Douglas for the Tokyo fight,” Rick said in reference to Douglas’s famous TKO of Tyson. “My dad went to Tokyo as an advisor for Don King Productions to evaluate what was going on with Mike. My dad had told him that he wasn’t ready for that fight, that Buster was in the best shape of his life. My dad trained him for a month and a half, almost two months. He was well ready to go and I’m sure that was instrumental in his victory over Mike Tyson.”

Giachetti trained Tyson for his next four fights, then returned to be in Tyson’s corner for the famous “bite fight” he lost to Evander Holyfield when Tyson bit off a piece of Holyfield’s ear during the third round.

“It was the most shocking thing I’ve ever seen in the ring,” Giachetti said in a later interview. “I was stunned. It was bizarre.”

Rick Giachetti was there.

“That was a heartbreaker for my father,” Rick said. “I know they had a closed camp and my dad said that Mike was in the best shape he ever was. But Evander had his number. He got in his head in between rounds, was talking up a storm, took Mike out of his game. And Mike lost it and did what he did.

“After the fight he was shaking his head and saying, ‘I just can’t believe it.’”

Giachetti also helped King when he began delving into the boxing business.

“Back in the early ‘70s when Don was getting started out my dad was at the very beginnings and helped Don in the negotiations for working with Bob Arum, and a couple other fighters,” Rick recalled. “They put together quite a few big boxing shows. My dad was always in the scenes.”

Rick had much respect for Pryor as a boxer.

“I had the opportunity to work with Aaron Pryor with my father for the second (Alexis) Arguello fight,” Rick said, a war that Pryor won by TKO.

Giachetti helped train Pryor but was not in his corner for the fight.

“Boxing is pretty controversial. Again, because of some political things, unfortunately, two weeks before the fight, some things happened between Sylvester Stallone and Aaron Pryor, because he had the promotional contract, my dad pulled out and we didn’t work the corner,” Rick said. “But we prepared him the whole training camp until two weeks before the fight.

“You see the results. Aaron was in great shape and did a phenomenal job. He was a great fighter. Hands down, Aaron Pryor I think, pound-for-pound, was one of the greatest welterweight champions of the world.”

Holmes was still the highlight of Giachetti’s career although after managing him from 1973 to 1981 a rift between the two developed and they parted ways.

Later on the two became friends again and remained in contact and even spoke to each other just a week before Giachetti died on Feb. 3, 2016.

“He’s one of the great guys out there,” Holmes said of Giachetti on RingTV.com. “Richie was a good guy.” He was a motivator: ‘Got get it, you can take this guy.’”

“They never lost touch, and to this day Larry still gives me a call and checks on the family,” Rick said. “I knew Larry from growing up from the time before he was world champion through his whole career. I used to stay at the training camp for like a month at a time. There’s a very good bond between our family and his family.”

Giachetti even worked in the movie industry. He choreographed fight scenes between Stallone and Dolph Lundgren in the movie Rocky IV.

“He was working with Sylvester Stallone. They started a production company,” Rick said. “He brought my dad in as a technical advisor. He really respected my father to look at some of the scenes and choreograph some of the stuff to make it be as true and realistic, to make it professional-looking.”

Giachetti appears in the background of the movie on a couple occasions.

“He’s in a couple other movies with Stallone that my dad was able to be in with him,” Rick pointed out.

Giachetti even succeeded in automobile racing.

“My dad was into racing before and during boxing and he built a couple cars and raced them at the Daytona 500,” Rick said. “When he set his mind at something, he was an achiever.

“I had one wild ride being the son of Richard Giachetti. All the respect from the movie stars and all the people, when I would go somewhere you’d mention his name, ‘You know who that is? That’s Richie Giachetti’s son.’ It’s an honor to carry the name. He’s definitely put a niche out there.”

Inductees and representatives will be recognized at the Hall of Fame Golf Outing/Luncheon/Social starting at 9 a.m. on June 16 at Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville. Those interested in participating in the golf outing or purchasing tickets for the luncheon should contact Katie Propes by phone at 724-415-2211 or email at kpropes@occluss.com.