

Forum

Is Boxing Immoral?

By Terrance J. Brennan

Last year, on the evening of Nov. 23, a boxer named Willie Classen stepped into the ring at New York's Madison Square Garden. He wasn't quite as lucky leaving the ring. The fighter was severely beaten, had to be taken to the hospital, slipped into a coma and died days later.

Five days after Classen's fight, the New York State Athletic Commission called a tentative halt to pro boxing. The commission, aware of a state committee's investigation into boxing safety, apparently decided it had to do something to make fighting less violent.

The ban was lifted a month later and the result has been some new requirements, including a basic eight-hour course in neurology for ringside doctors, referees and other personnel, and a lengthened suspension for a fighter knocked out in a match (90 days instead of 30).

Many critics feel that the new requirements will not succeed in making boxing any safer. But perhaps the most intense criticism of the sport comes from those who point out that it's the nature of the game to want to cause your opponent physical injury in order to win. All of which brings up the question: Is boxing immoral?

Father John Harvey, a moral theologian on the faculty at DeSales School of Theology in Maryland, believes that it is. He had expressed his distaste for the sport as early as 1948, when he wrote a paper on the subject for his licentiate degree.

"No, things haven't changed much at all since I wrote that," Father Harvey said in a recent interview. "I watch fights on TV every once in a while and I don't see any difference. Boxers are still out to hurt each other."

He says that opponents try to directly hit and injure vital organs, such as the stomach and the head. It's an intention that he describes as "immoral and unjustifiable in

terms of sport."

Carmen Basilio, former welterweight and middleweight boxing champion and currently on staff in the athletic department at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, feels that if that's the case, "then football is immoral because people get injured, basketball is immoral because people get injured, baseball is immoral because people get injured, and so on. Boxing is part of life; these things (injuries) are going to happen."

Basilio, commenting on Father Harvey's remarks, sarcastically felt that the same consideration should thus be given to driving cars and flying in planes, too. "But we don't get as upset when people are killed in plane crashes, like the AAU boxing team in Warsaw," Basilio said.

Father Harvey feels that boxing is the only sport which has as its stated goal physically injuring an opponent. In other sports, injuries happen but always as the result of accidents or "unsportsmanlike conduct."

"That's not the case in professional boxing," Father Harvey added. "What the fighter does is analogous to the professional football player crushing the ankle of a player on the opposing team to put him out of action." But, in football, he says, it is against the rules.

"I go along with the new regulations," Basilio said, "but how many times does a football player get knocked out in a game, get revived, and then get put right back in the game? Boxers have to sit out 90 days."

Medical records testify to the damage, often irreparable, done to boxers in the ring. Among the more serious injuries reported by hospitals are concussions and hemorrhages which cause brain damage and can ultimately result in the common syndrome known as "punch drunkenness."

Nor is death, as happened to Willie Classen, unusual.



CARMEN BASILIO

He was but one of eight fighters to die inside the ropes in 1979, and one of more than 60 during the past decade.

"The only reason the public doesn't condemn the sport is that it just can't see the evil of it," Father Harvey said. "Once in a while, we get upset by the death of a boxer. They suspend it for a while and everyone is concerned. But then they apply some band-aids and boxing is back again after a few weeks."

"I never went into the ring with that attitude (to cause injury)," Basilio said. "My attitude was just to get out there and win."

"I doubt very much that there are any boxers that want to injure their opponents. They're in there to win — that's their only thought."

Easter Tells Us We Can Make It

Long before psychology became a science, the church incorporated a lot of sound psychological insights into its religious practices.

For example, all of us found it easier to make a generous commitment to some penitential practice during Lent because "I know I can keep it up for six weeks."

Of course, there were times when we didn't keep it up, but it was easier to make a painful decision — and to live with it — when we were aware of the limited duration of the ordeal.

Alcoholics Anonymous uses the same kind of psychology with its strategy: "You're not giving up liquor for the rest of your life; you're giving it up for just one day... one day at a time."

When Jesus offered us the gift of his Resurrection (and the promise of our own) he provided his followers with an insight that should be a tremendous help in overcoming discouragement and despair.

He didn't establish a set time of waiting for the fulfillment of his kingdom, his second coming (though a lot of his early followers thought it was going to be a short wait).

But he did offer us the assurance that we could put aside all our deepest anxieties and gloomiest worries. He offered us the assurance that eventually the whole story of humanity, which includes all our worries, will come out right.

At this time, our nation seems to be living with an

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

overload, of frustration and worry which is especially depressing because we are unable to forecast the termination date for the difficulties, because we can't see clear signs of progress toward solutions.

The infuriating sense of powerlessness symbolized by the hostages in Iran... the unyielding pressures of inflation, with all the hardship they involve... the sense that international threats are slipping beyond the control of the identifiable leaders of superpowers — all these worries, along with the anxiety over the breakdown of family, government, church, give us a sense that we are sliding into an unpredictable chaos.

It's necessary for me to be concerned, as a citizen, about many of these problems to do whatever I can to act responsibly, as one member of society.

But, as a believer in the Resurrection, I also have another perspective which saves me from the temptation to give up,

to yield to despair.

The Resurrection assures me that the welfare of humanity does not ultimately depend on any of those candidates who are unconvincingly proclaiming: "I've got the answers, if only you'll elect me to be your president."

Ultimately we are not totally dependent on the bizarre maneuverings of the Ayatollah Khomeini or the leaders of OPEC or the succession of terrorists who threaten to destroy innocent lives to have their own way.

Jesus, in his Resurrection, confirms his revelation that the ultimate welfare of humanity is in the providence of a loving Father. Along the way, there might be a great many scary moments, but eventually it's going to come out right; the kingdom of justice and peace and growth toward God will prevail.

The Risen Lord is a sign and a cause of the mysterious fulfillment of that revelation. Just how we shall stumble through the desert toward the kingdom, just how long the pilgrimage will take, we don't know.

I do know, however, that my personal share of the journey will not last too long. The actuarial tables of insurance companies give me some idea of the duration of my personal Lent.

With this knowledge, with the knowledge of the Lord's Resurrection, I should be able to breathe easily. I know I can keep up the effort that long.

Looking Back...

From the pages of the Courier-Journal: 75 years ago this week — May be bad form to begin with a commercial but how many readers know there were go-carts back in 1905? An advertisement on Page 2, April 1, 1905, proclaimed: "Go-Carts for 1905." The ad, for Sibley, Lindsay & Curr, said, "The baby's turnout has been revolutionized in the past few years. By the process of evolution or some other method, the carriage has been turned into a go-cart... range in price from \$2.25 to \$12.50."

In a somewhat more serious vein, was this piece: "Daniel Sully, the natural actor, who scored such a brilliant success as Father Whalen in 'The Parish Priest,' has found another big winner in the three-act comedy drama, 'Our Pastor,' written for him by Jerrold Shepard, which will be presented in this city at the National Theatre next Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday." Couldn't find the price but at the same time at the Cook Opera House an eight-act bill cost from 10 to 25 matinees and from 10 to 50 at night. Cents, that is.

How about this for a public challenge? "In the last issue of the Catholic Citizen which was dated Thursday, we notice the claim that the Citizen has 10,000 subscribers. We have our doubts about the statement... and we make the following proposition: We will agree to forfeit \$100 to

any Catholic hospital to be selected by a committee of four or five representative firms if upon investigation, The Citizen is able to prove a bonafide circulation of 10,000 or even 5,000 copies each issue. White paper bills and post office receipts to be the basis of ascertaining circulation. For the committee, we would suggest the advertising gentlemen from Burke FitzSimons, Hond & Co.; Sibley, Lindsay & Curr; McCurdy, Nowell Co.; Fraley & Carey Co.; Weis & Fisher Co., and Glenny & Co.

"This offer is made for the purpose of allowing a Catholic paper to prove the truth of its assertions which it should at all times be able and ready to do."

50 years ago this week — Under the Page 1 headline, "A Chinese Rose" was a one-column photo with this description of Madame Wu, the wife of the Chinese ambassador to the U.S.: "She is a brilliant woman, highly educated, home-loving and a devout Catholic."

The second lead story on that Page 1 was under the headline: "Beautiful Tribute Paid to Buenos Ayres by a Talented Writer." A subhead further explained, "Francis Parkinson Keyes Found the City's Parks and Buildings Magnificent, Its Institutions Inspiring, Its People Cultured, Charming and Wholly Hospitable." More headline: "Immigrants Welcomed and Cared For, And Babies Are Found in Every Home." Then came a rather long story which in turn was about a story in Good Housekeeping

magazine.

25 years ago this week — On Page 4, an article describing the traditions of the days of Holy Week was written by Father Henry Atwell, God bless him!

Inside was a story on the dedication of the new marble altar at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Hornell. Assisting Bishop Casey were Father Edward McAniff, the bishop's secretary; the Very Rev. Lawrence Gannon, dean of Steuben County; Father Joseph McDonnell, pastor; Father Leo Lynch, chaplain of St. James Mercy Hospital; Father John Hayes, chaplain of the Bath VA center; Father Joseph Haffey; Father Norbert Nolan; Father Leo Mans; Father Robert MacNamara.

10 years ago this week — Page 1 headline, "Abortion: Law Repeat Loses by 3 Votes in Assembly" over the story which began, "Abortion on demand is dead at least temporarily although proponents vow to secure a new Assembly vote

Approved movies were "Hello, Dolly!," "Fantasia," and "The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes." Objectionable was "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice." An oddity — "Midnight Cowboy" was rated X by the Hollywood people but the Catholic office judged it for Adults with Reservations.