

SPORTS
FEATURE

Ali's appearance thrills Aquinas throngs

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In all 62 years the Aquinas Mission Bouts have taken place, this year's event was by far "The Greatest."

And holding the Mission Bouts in the school's new Wegman-Napier Center only accounted for part of the event's success.

In boxing circles, you simply can't get a more special guest than the man who



Muhammad Ali intently watches the Mission Bouts from ringside.

presided at ringside last Thursday evening, March 10.

He was none other than Muhammad Ali, arguably the best and most widely recognized boxer of all time.

His speech and actions are limited by an ongoing battle with Parkinson's syndrome, but the 52-year-old Ali delighted 1,500 spectators by willingly signing autographs, mugging for the cameras, and shaking each boxer's hand after his fight had concluded.

The lasting appeal of this three-time world heavyweight champion was also

evident during a student assembly held the following morning. Although current Aquinas pupils are too young to remember Ali's final heavyweight bout in 1981, they still gave him four standing ovations.

Those cheers threatened to blow the Wegman-Napier Center's roof off when, at one point, Ali stepped away from the podium and playfully challenged Aquinas sophomore Chris Schwab to a shadow-boxing match. As he and Schwab danced around the floor, Ali suddenly resurrected the fleet-footed movements which had contributed toward his self-proclaimed designation as "The Greatest."

In Ali's only public speech during his two-day stay, he implored the Aquinas students to reflect upon the "purpose of life."

"My purpose was to be a great boxer so I could use it for other things," Ali remarked.

Those "other things" include goodwill appearances in all corners of the world. A devout Muslim, Ali travels approximately 250 days out of the year, said his close friend of 30 years, Howard Bingham.

"Ali never thought he was bigger than anyone else," Bingham remarked. "He's

Here are the winners from the 62nd annual Aquinas Mission Bouts:

Featherweight — Tony Kasandrinos.

Middleweight — Nick Dwyer.

Bantamweight — Mike Reisinger.

Welterweight — Chris Latoski.

Lightweight — Mike Burke.

Light heavyweight — Joe Muratore.

Exhibition — Issy Sak and Coach Kevin Farrell, no decision.

Lightweight — Nick Valentino.

Middleweight — Mario Avila.

Bantamweight — Rory Zimmer.

Middleweight — Nick Mannella.

Super lightweight — Chris Schwab.

Heavyweight — Mike Benedict.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

A bloodied Dominic Pezzola puts up a good battle in the middleweight division against Mario Avila during the 62nd Aquinas Mission Bouts held March 10.

accommodating; he likes to make people happy."

Ali's stay in Rochester was arranged through the efforts of the Aquinas Sports Booster Club. According to Booster Club representative Bob Schwab, he and fellow members conceived the idea one night at Bathub Billy's Sports Bar in Rochester.

"Joe Giordano (Bathub Billy's co-owner and a Booster Club member) said, 'Why don't we get Muhammad Ali?' And everyone laughed," Schwab recalled. "But when (Ali's managers) found out it was a Christian school and money was going to the missions, that's all it took."

Proceeds from each year's Mission Bouts go toward the Basilian Fathers Missions in Mexico and Colombia. The

1994 bouts generated an all-time high of \$7,000 in mission money raised.

For the local folks, the Mission Bouts annually provide an evening of boxing excitement. Last Thursday's card featured 12 official matches and one exhibition involving Aquinas students.

Larry Allen, a three-time Mission Bouts champion in the late 1940s, claimed that the Mission Bouts' longevity can be directly tied to the school's strong Basilian tradition.

"There's been a certain spirit at Aquinas, and most students still have that same feeling," said Allen, who now serves as historian for the Rochester Boxing Association. "I think there's a certain aura, or grace, that the Basilian Fathers imparted."

McQuaid relay places 3rd at nationals

SYRACUSE — McQuaid Jesuit took its place among the country's indoor track elite by running to an All-American finish in the distance medley relay at the National Scholastic Championships, held March 12-13 at the Carrier Dome.

The distance medley included Adam Reitz running the 1,200-meter leg, Tim Tyre in the 400, Shawn Watts in the 800 and Dan Lesser in the 1,600. Their time was 10 minutes, 31.43 seconds, good for third place. A top-three finish was necessary to achieve All-American status.

"That was a little unexpected. The fact that they got into the top three — they were really excited," said Coach Dave Warth, who noted that the relay lowered its previous-best time by an entire 15 seconds.

Other McQuaid competitors at the nationals included Shawn Watts, who placed 13th in the 800 run; and Dan Lesser, who took 13th in the 3,200.

Also competing in the meet was Geneva DeSales' Stephanie Nearpass, who took 25th in the girls' 3,200.

Swimmer captures national championship

It was a national-championship weekend for Nazareth College swimmer Kim Schneider, who triumphed at the NCAA Division III championships.

But any hopes of a national title for the St. John Fisher College women's basketball team have been thwarted.

Schneider, a senior at Nazareth, won the 100-yard butterfly in national competition held Friday, March 11, at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass.

She posted a time of 56.74 seconds to become only the second national swimming champion in school history.

In addition to her first-place showing, Schneider took All-American honors in

two other events by placing third in the 100 freestyle and sixth in the 50 free.

Meanwhile, the St. John Fisher Lady Cardinals suffered their first defeat against 28 wins with a 59-55 loss to Defiance College of Ohio in an NCAA pre-quarterfinal contest played March 11 in Columbus, Ohio.

Fisher fell behind 20-3 and never caught up, despite making a nice second-half rally. Becky Armstrong led the Lady Cardinals with 13 points.

Going into the game against Defiance, Fisher was the only remaining undefeated Division III squad — men or women — in the country.

Knights' Kazley earns fifth place in state competition

McQuaid Jesuit senior swimmer Doug Kazley ended his high-school career on an upbeat note, placing fifth at state competition held over the weekend.

Kazley earned a time of 53.53 seconds in the 100-yard backstroke finals at the New York State Public High School Athletic Association championships. The

state meet took place March 11-12 at Nottingham High School in Syracuse.

Kazley's fifth-place finish enabled him to rise above the No. 9 seeding he carried into the meet.

In addition to the backstroke, Kazley competed in the 50 freestyle at states. He placed 14th with a time of :22.30.

Kings eliminated in qualifier

ROCHESTER — Even in defeat, it was obvious how drastically this team had improved.

The Bishop Kearney boys' basketball squad took Franklin down to the wire before falling, 52-46, in a state Class B qualifier contest last Wednesday, March 9. The game was held at the Community War Memorial.

Franklin had blown out the Kings by 30 and 23 points in two regular-season games, but the Quakers were not assured of victory until the final minute of play this time around.

The loss gave BK a final 1993-94 record of 15-8. Five nights earlier, the Kings had earned the school's first-ever Section 5 basketball title by upsetting previously undefeated Pittsford Sutherland, 59-56 in overtime, in the Class B championship game.

Last Wednesday's contest saw BK and Franklin deadlocked at 10-10 after one quarter. Franklin took a five-point lead late in the second quarter, but the Kings ran off eight straight points to go up 28-25 early in the third period.

Franklin answered with an eight-point run of its own later in the third, and the Kings were saddled with a 39-33 deficit entering the final eight minutes of play.

The Quakers went up by as many as nine points before a three-point basket by BK's Vernon Banks made the score 50-46 with 25 seconds remaining. Franklin's Trenton Jackson canned two free throws with :10 left for the game's final points.

Senior center Richard Cannon was BK's high scorer with 13 points.

Coach Ed Nictopski was pleased with his club's effort against the Quakers, who had defeated BK by scores of 74-



Lauren McFalls/Photo Intern
Bishop Kearney's Richard Cannon (20) blocks a shot by Franklin's Robert Martin. The Kings lost to the Quakers, 52-46.

44 and 71-48 during the regular season.

"We missed some shots, but for the most part played pretty good defense. I thought we were pretty loose," he said.

"It was a memorable season for me," the veteran coach added. "I've enjoyed lots of good seasons, and this is one of the best."

—Mike Latona