

Myth 140: Bull

By Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist



“No son-of-a-bitch ever knocked me off my feet,” boasted “Jake” LaMotta, the middleweight boxing champion between 1949 and 1951.

The feature film *Raging Bull* (1980), directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Robert De Niro as LaMotta, took for granted LaMotta’s claim in his autobiography that no boxer ever knocked him down.

But Danny Nardico, who died in Sacramento on Nov. 22, 2010 at age 85, knocked him down. He did it with a right in the seventh round of a light heavyweight fight in Coral Gables, Florida, on New Year's Eve, 1952. The bout can be viewed on YouTube. LaMotta's corner stopped the bout before the eighth round of the scheduled ten-round contest.

Nardico was a battle-scarred ex-Marine who received the Silver Star during World War II. It was LaMotta who helped Nardico get started in the fight game in 1949. The one-time light heavyweight contender who fought out of Tampa, Florida, had a ring record of 50 wins (35 by knockout), 13 losses, and 4 draws. Nardico was particularly proud of being the only boxer to deck LaMotta, even if it was near the end of the Raging Bull's ring career. So, not surprisingly, he was furious that the movie failed to credit him with the knockdown.

Nardico coached boxing and ran the recreation program at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center (NNCC) in Carson City for over fifteen years. I remember seeing the yellowed newspaper clippings of the LaMotta fight and other Nardico memorabilia outside his office at the weigh-ins prior to my three-round boxing match at NNCC in 1977 (I won the contest by technical knock out over my inmate opponent).

The first time I met Nardico was after LaMotta's autobiography was published in 1970 but before the release of *Raging Bull* in 1980. The movie was a box-office hit and De Niro received the Academy Award for best actor. However, Nardico's legacy in the boxing world was ignored in the film. I met Nardico again while playing a softball game at NNCC after *Raging Bull's* release. He clearly felt robbed of his glory.

Hopefully, this column sets the record straight in paying tribute, and bidding farewell, to a one-time Nevadan and the only boxer to knock down the colorful and controversial Jake LaMotta.

Photo credit: Danny Nardico, left, and Frank Sinatra, Jr. at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center Gym in Carson City. Photo courtesy of Nardico's grandson, Richard C. Galindo, Jr.

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