

# Angelo Dundee shaped Muhammad Ali

BY NANCY STETSON

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Angelo Dundee knows boxing. He's been in the business for almost 60 years.

He also knows boxers; he was the trainer for Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard and George Foreman as well as champion boxers Willie Pastrano and Carmen Basilio. He trained 15 world champions, and in 1994 was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Dundee continues to train boxers and also delivers boxing commentary for fights on TV.

It was Dundee who taught Will Smith how to box like the Champ for the biopic "Ali" and he also served as boxing consultant for the movie "The Cinderella Man," about boxer James J. Braddock. Dundee also had a part in the movie as Russell Crowe's cut man. At times, he'd get so excited watching Crowe fight that he'd yell out instructions, forgetting they were filming a pre-rehearsed scene. (After winning a big fight, Crowe, as Braddock, spontaneously leaned over and kissed Dundee's bald head.)

As a young man starting out, Dundee hung out at Jack Dempsey's restaurant, Toot Shor's, the Garden Cafeteria, Stillman's Gym and the Neutral Corner, all in New York City, listening to trainers talk boxing.

"It matched anything the fabled Algonquin Round Table had to offer," he writes. "...I was privy to some of the greatest stories of all time, told by some of boxing's greatest storytellers. As they sat at the Neutral sipping their ten-cent beers and chewing on their ten-day-old cigars or at the Garden Cafeteria nursing their coffees, they talked and talked and talked, holding nothing back, their experiences, their advice, and their tall tales all told in a gleeful mangling of the English language with tortured syntax and marvelously invented words..."

Now, Dundee is one of those storytellers with a lifetime of boxing matches, adventures and experiences to share. As a trainer, a corner man, he had one of the best views of the last 60 years of boxing.

He tells them all in a Runyon-esque voice in his new memoir, "My View From the Corner: A Life in Boxing," written with boxing writer/ESPN sports analyst Bert Randolph Sugar (a regular guest on Miller & Moulton on Sportsradio ESPN 770). Muhammad Ali provides the foreword.

For example, Dundee writes about a fighter he trained who "had three speeds: slow, stop, and wait-a-minute." He writes about a young fighter who "was always in search of two-legged wildlife, his out-of-the-ring nocturnal antics including things you wouldn't find on French postcards. Once, during a sit-down interview with British sports writer Dick Curry, Willie went into such graphic detail recounting his various sexcapades that a shocked Curry had to excuse himself to, as they say over there, go out to regurgitate."

Dundee will speak and sign copies of his book Saturday, March 15 at the Lee County Reading Festival held in downtown Fort Myers at the Harborside Event Center and Centennial Park. He'll speak in room C1 at Harborside at 12:15 p.m.

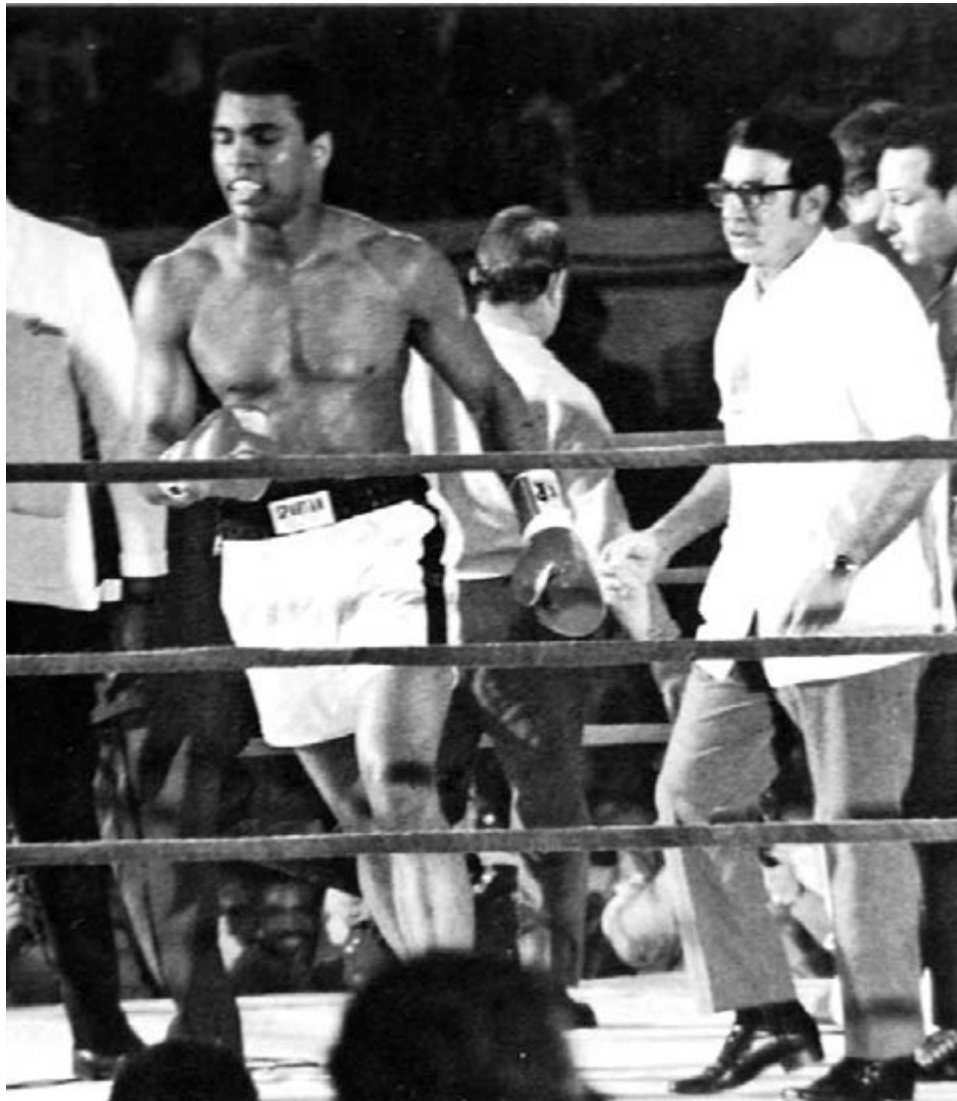
Here are some of his comments and remembrances, which he delivered in his no-nonsense South Philly accent, in a recent phone interview:

## On "My View From the Corner":

You'll get a kick out of it, because it's '48 'til now.

They're true, the stories. There's no fabrication in any of it. Because I lived it, I was around it, and the people I'm explaining about were friends of mine.

Me and Bert Sugar did ESPN classics. And Bert says, "Ange, you got a pretty good story to tell." I said, I don't know, I told my story before, it was a love story,



PHOTOS FROM MY VIEW FROM THE CORNER  
Above: Angelo Dundee at Muhammad Ali's side in an early fight. Left: Dundee was enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1994.

and it didn't go too far. I think it was double-printed in England, because I've been in England many many times with fighters.

For my first book, I didn't have a guy who writes like Bert Sugar. And I didn't have a guy who mingles like Bert Sugar. So it's two guys mingling and two guys hustling, and enjoying doing it.

We talked. I tell you, he got me something where I can talk into a machine, but it's not the same. You see, when you're doing it one-on-one, then you get a better response out of each other. Talking to a dictating machine doesn't do it.

I've been very fortunate in my career as a fight guy, I got interviewed by a lot of nice people, geniuses in their own way. Howard Cosell, the guys, Al Buck, Mr. Bromberg. These guys would pry me with questions, and I got pretty good where I could bounce back and give them stuff they were trying to get out of me. I had to blend with those guys.

All of a sudden I'm with the book guys. Isn't that wonderful? All of a sudden I've got a new bunch of friends. I love it. I can blend with that scene. I think a fight guy has the capability of blending in with all those things.

## On the varied role of a trainer:

You gotta see what the guy has. What-

ever he's got natural, you leave it alone. But you teach him things to do that benefit him. Like I tell you, it's different approaches. Some guys you can badger, some guys you gotta back off, some guys, you can't make them think that they gotta do it, they gotta do it. They gotta want to do it. There's just something — it's not a God-given thing — it's something you pick up, intelligence, from working with different people.

Muhammad thought he invented everything. He was the superstar. You don't try to contain jet propulsion. If you try to contain it, it falls flat. Let him take his head, and you try to direct it. It's like a movie director, producer, same thing. We all got to have these little traits to help the individual, the guy, the fighter.

You gotta remember, you're not the star, the fighter's the star. You know, for four years, people thought I was a mute. I never got a word in, because I didn't want to put a word in. Muhammad used to leave all you writers limp. One time one guy says to me, "Ange, we want to talk to you." I said, "Well thank God!"

I have fun. This is another key. You gotta have fun at what you do. You can't make it a crisis, you can't make it, "Oh my God, we gotta do this!" You can't do that.

Trainers, between you and I, have a camaraderie. People think we're working against each other, but we have a relationship where we like each other. We have no problems. Nobody resents anybody else for having a fight.

I watch all the fights. I tell you, it's ridiculous. I was 19 years with Muhammad. I mean today, they change trainers like they put on a new pair of shorts. I don't know why they do that, it doesn't ring a bell with me, because you're better off going with what you've got. It got you there, so you might as well stay with it. But you know, you can't read a fighter's mind, they're intricate.

I watch all fights because I have to be prepared if someone asks me about an individual. I got to be able to speak intelligently and give my rendition of what I think about

if you go

- >> **What:** Lee County Reading Festival
- >> **When:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 15
- >> **Where:** Harborside Event Center and Centennial Park, downtown Fort Myers
- >> **Cost:** Free
- >> **Information:** Call 337-READ or go to [www.lee-county.com/library](http://www.lee-county.com/library)
- >> **Angelo Dundee speaks** at 12:15 p.m. in Room C1 at the Harborside Event Center

the fighter.

## On fighters and winning and losing:

You don't meet a more intricate personality than a fighter. They're intricate. And that's why they're so special. Everybody can't be a fighter.

The desire to be best at what you do makes the best fighters. In other words, you've got to be the best of what you do to reach the ultimate, become a champion. You just can't be one of a bunch, you've got to be a separatist. You can't mingle, you can't keep late hours, you can't walk down the street with a girl because then you're a womanizer, you can't go into a bar — "You're a drunk."

What you're selling is an image. You're selling a good kid. That's why [Oscar] De La Hoya glowed. That's why [Sugar] Ray Leonard captured the people after Muhammad, because he's got charisma. And he had talent. Don't get me wrong, you gotta have talent. But charisma comes in handy. But if you don't have talent, charisma ain't gonna help you.

If you hear me talk to a young kid coming out of the amateurs, you'd think I'm trying to discourage him. It's a tough profession. You don't make money early on, you've got to take a lot of abuse. You're going to lose one now and then. You have to learn how to handle adversity. You've got to learn, don't let it get you down. My theory is, if you learn something from a loss, you're a winner.

It's true. Many a time I went into a dressing room where I watched the fight and seen a kid get licked. And I went in and said, "Look, you'll be better for this. Don't let it bother you. Tomorrow is another day."

[From a loss], you also learn what not to do the next time. You're a better human being for it.

The other tough thing is this: when you're on top, it's great. When you slide down below, there's no in-between. It's great, or nothing. And don't you feel wonderful when you walk down the street and they say, "Who's that guy? Probably a former world champion."

It's a profession of extremes. There's no sliding gently. The light gets turned off.

## On what he looks for in a fighter:

I look where the guy don't have to be persuaded to go to the gym every day. Now a great fighter like Muhammad Ali was the first fighter in the gym and the last guy to leave. The gymnasium was his stage. The gymnasium was where he prepared. He loved it, he had a great time.

It's simple basics, really. I look at a kid; if I got a tall kid, I'll make him taller. If I got a short kid, I'll make him shorter. If you're tall, you got to reach for a guy, if they're short, the guy's gonna be banging down on you, so you give him a little less to bang down on, you slide on him. Rocky Marciano was the greatest, because he was not a tall guy. But Charley Goldman was a genius, he trained him. He was one of my teachers. And he made him short, slick, smart. And he made him the world champion, undefeated world champion of the world.

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