

# 'Fallen Warriors' Honored

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mitted to upholding their good image and acting as good role models for younger boxers.

"There was a real unity," he said. "Nobody wanted to do anything to embarrass the team."

But after the team disbanded, the image the boxers fought so hard to maintain liquidated along with it. Rahsaan said of the 12 deceased boxers, only three died of natural causes.

Seattle fight. Johnson had just won a silver medal and could hardly move. The pain turned out to be bone cancer.

"I told him to go to the doctor and he was dead in six to nine months," Rahsaan said. "He was only 22 or 23."

Pete Vastine White played in local bands, did a lot of fishing and worked construction before passing away in his sleep at the age 45 in 1988.

Joe Banks died a couple years

dying himself.

"He was always a good natured person who motivated others," Rahsaan said. "He was always talking about what he was going to do and how much he was going to accomplish."

Other boxers had their lives cut short by gun violence. Police shot Joe Hopkins in the 1980s and Marcellus Allen was shot by his girlfriend. Joel 'JD' Stroud was shot in the back of his head and Herb Le Suer, who Rahsaan remembers as

team members' deaths were precipitated by the use of drugs and alcohol.

There was John Howard, who won the nationals at age 14 and was voted Most Outstanding Boxer—even though the minimum age to compete was 16. Rahsaan said even a mediocre southpaw can give a good right-handed boxer trouble, but Howard was more than mediocre.

"He was super and he knew he was good," Rahsaan said. "But he got wrapped up in the chemical abuse lifestyle and died sometime in the late 1980s."

The same story applies to Pete Gonzales, a featherweight who turned professional and went on to become No. 8 in the world for his weight class.

"Trying to hit him was like killing flies," Rahsaan said. "And he always had a lot of heart."

Joe West became a poet, got into drugs and died sometime in the 80s. Rahsaan kept in touch with him for a while and describes the poetry he wrote and presented around Portland as revolutionary.

Rahsaan has no idea what became of Clyde Williams, but said the death that most personally touched him was that of his sparring partner, Tony Jacobs.

He considers it ironic that Jacobs, who Coach Lincoln would measure the other boxers against during physical fitness tests, would turn to drugs.

"He was the first one in to train and the last one to leave," Rahsaan



PHOTO BY WYNDE DYER

Halim Rahsaan holds a newspaper clipping of boxer Johnny Howard.

said. "We called him 'The Toy Champion' because he was like a little doll you would wind up and turn loose."

Jacobs was found dead from

*He was the first one in to train and the last one to leave. We called him 'The Toy Champion' because he was like a little doll you would wind up and turn loose.*

—Halim Rahsaan

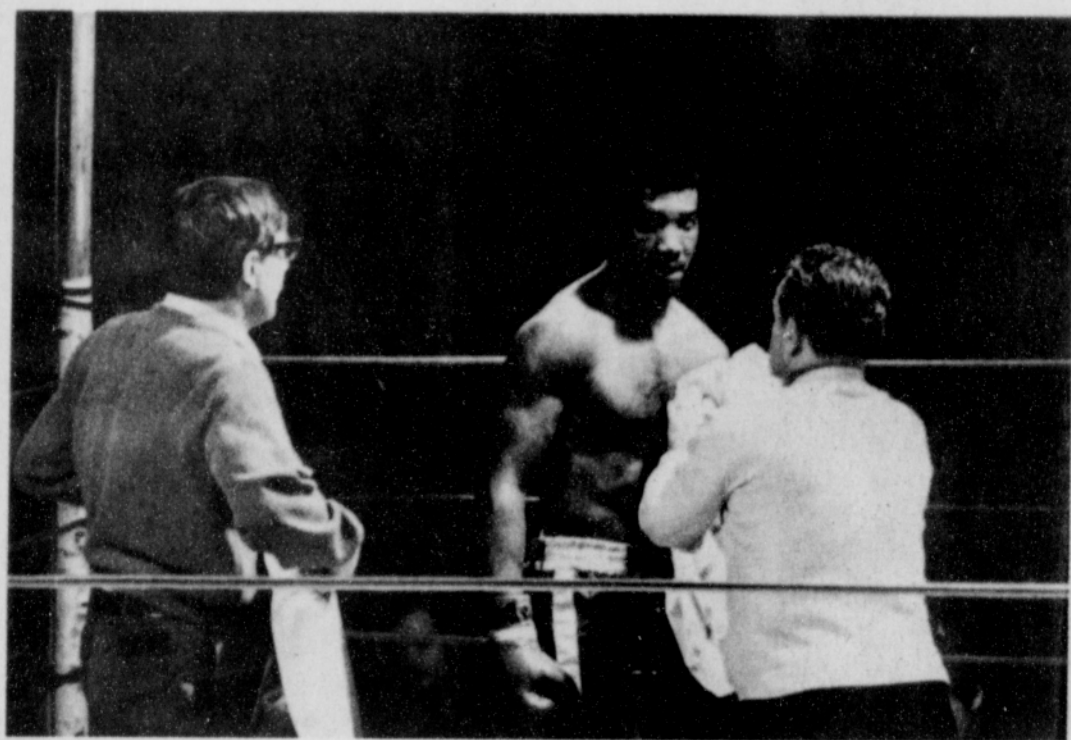
boxing he always found it more important to worry about the fighters he's never heard of, rather than the ones with the collection of trophies and titles.

"If you fight somebody with a name and you lose, it's no big deal," he said. "But if you fight a nobody and you lose, that nobody becomes a somebody."

Although all of the 12 deceased Knott Street Boxers have both titles and trophies to their credit, Rahsaan worries that if their stories are not told and their legacies not remembered they would lose their place in Portland athletic history.

He hopes the commemoration dinner will keep that from happening.

For more information contact Lee Jenkins at 503-823-3631 or Halim Rahsaan at 503-281-2804 ext. 115.



Tony Jacobs, known by teammates as 'The Toy Champion,' is in the ring in a historical Knott Street Boxing photo. Jacobs was found dead behind a dumpster just five weeks ago.

First there was Sam Johnson, who represented the United States in 1967. Rahsaan remembers Johnson complaining about pain in his hip on the trip home from a

ago in a tragic fishing accident. Rahsaan said a boat flipped over and no one was wearing life jackets. Banks saved another fisherman who couldn't swim and ended up

an older boxer that the kids always looked up to, died in his 30s when he was shot by an acquaintance during an altercation.

More often than not, Knott Street

weather exposure behind a north Portland dumpster just five weeks ago.

Rahsaan said in the world of

## COURAGEOUS

AFRICAN AMERICANS



by Ron Weber

### Commendable Restraint

Injustice propels Frederick Douglass to national consciousness

Driven by anger at the injustice against African Americans, Frederick Douglass gravitated from slavery to center stage in our national consciousness. He rejected revenge on whites in favor of the pen and pulpit to educate racist America on the cruelties of its treatment of African Americans.

Douglass was born to a slave woman named Harriet Bailey and an unknown father. He was raised by free black grandparents. At eight years old, Frederick Bailey, as he was named then, was sent to live in Boston where his master's wife would teach him to read and write, often using the bible. After her husband forbade the educating of blacks in his home, young Frederick was forced to teach himself. At the age of 12, he saved money to buy his first book, "The Columbian Orator." When the master began to notice that Frederick was somewhat insolent and seemed more intelligent than the other slaves in the household, he sent him to a cruel slave breaker. It was here that Frederick decided he could no longer bear the lash.

"I am fast in my chains... I will run away," his narratives report.

Frederick did just that. At the age of 23 he ran north to New York and changed his last name to Johnson. Shortly after, he changed it to Douglass, a name found in Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake." He found employment on the docks and raised a family in New Bedford. Douglass then began attending anti-slavery rallies.

In 1838, his life would drastically change when he heard William Lloyd Garrison speak. Douglass was

so moved he began his own career as an orator and writer. Several years later he would find himself in Rochester, New York working as an editor. Between 1847 and 1874, some of his papers included the North Star, Frederick Douglass Paper, Douglass Monthly and the New Era.

Douglass had many opportunities to take revenge on whites but refused to match bigotry with violence. His pursuit of peaceful justice would have made Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. proud.

His dramatic portrayals of life as a slave greatly impressed mostly white audiences throughout New York and other northern states. His listeners would rise to their feet in loud applause after hearing his stories of tortuous treatment and how he broke free to marry the woman he loved. With his wife, who also was a former

slave, and their children in the audience, the crowds wept and cheered while listening to his harrowing tales. Throughout his life Douglass spoke and wrote on the treatment of black slaves, insisting on equality for all persons in America and across the world. His message was the same in Europe where he was extremely well received.

During his later years, Douglass held several government posts, such as United States Marshall for the District of Columbia and minister to Haiti. Towards the end of his life Douglass also joined Ida B. Wells in her anti-lynching campaign and began arguing for the rights of women of all colors.

On Feb. 20, 1895, Douglass attended a National Women's Council meeting. After the session, the 77-year-old Douglass went home and died. He left behind a legacy of bravery, encouraging people of all colors and nationalities to fight for equality, no matter what the cost.

Ron Weber is a retired electrician and frequent writer and speaker on African American history. He is a regular contributor to the Portland Observer.



Frederick Douglass

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