

ANTUOFERMO'S ALL BUSINESS; HE WON'T BE DISTRACTED IN QUEST TO REGAIN TITLE; MONTICELLO, N.Y. - THE KUTSHER WOMAN HAS GRAY HAIR, CLACKING DENTURES,; A BROOKLYN ACCENT, A PLASTIC HIP, A LATE HUSBAND AND GOES BY THE NAME; OF "BUBBY." VITO ANTUOFERMO LOVES HER.

[FIRST Edition]

Boston Globe (pre-1997 Fulltext) - Boston, Mass.

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Date: May 31, 1981

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Section: SPORTS

Document Text

"These women," said Vito, "are beautiful. To me they are beautiful. Because when I'm in training, I don't want no distractions."

On the wall in the bedroom of Antuofermo's sparring partner, Winfield Braithwaite, hang the golden lush images of two Playboy centerfolds. Braithwaite, 24, has not practiced the art of denial as long as Vito. The walls in Vito's bedroom are plaster white and monastery bare.

Kutsher's is in its 74th year as a Catskills resort and possibly may be younger than most of the women who come here to play shuffleboard and dine on Schmaltz Herring. The Kutsher Woman is vivacious and friendly and likes nothing better than to pinch Vito on his cheek. When the sun goes down she plays bingo and then goes to sleep.

It is a marriage made in heaven: The boxer in training and the woman on Social Security. Freddie Brown, Antuofermo's 73-year-old trainer, decided Kutsher's was the best place to consummate it.

"Look," said Antuofermo, "it would be nice if young girls were around, but Freddie figures if you're around old people you're not going to look at anybody."

"I trained in Miami the first time I fought Hagler and it was all young girls and I was looking every time I went outside. Every time I had my door open there was girls going by. I had my brother Nicky with me and he was dating girls every night. Freddie had an adjoining room and we would be playing cards and Freddie would hear Nicky with his dates and get mad. Here he isn't getting mad at all."

It is an axiom in boxing that sex is taboo for as much as 8-10 weeks before a fight, the reasoning being that sex weakens a fighter. Scientific evidence supporting this idea is nil, but trainers who hold to it are not.

"It is a mental thing as well as physical," said Carlos (Panama) Lewis, Antuofermo's cotrainer. "The fighter, he should take out his energy and frustration on his opponent."

"If you want to do things right," said Antuofermo, who fights Marvin Hagler June 13 for the middleweight title, "this is how you gotta do it. To me this place is not suffering because I couldn't do anything anyway. No matter if there was girls around or not. I couldn't do anything. I don't usually fool around. A while ago, yeah, before I won the title. It hurt me a few times."

"When you're a fighter, you gotta put everything into it every day. You can recuperate in a day, yeah, but you waste a day.

"Before I wasn't as serious. But I been serious for about three years now. I don't even bother to look at the broads. I got a wife, two children, it don't even bother me. I do my things after the fight. Disco and things like that. It doesn't bother me."

Reclining on one of two double beds in his room, wearing a sweat suit and running shoes, Antuofermo strokes his new beard reflectively. He ran in the morning, boxed in the afternoon and walked with Brown after the evening meal. This is not one of the nights for his favorite television sitcoms, and the newspapers are already read. There is little to do but watch the twilight dim from gray to charcoal.

"Right now everything on my mind is Hagler, Hagler, Hagler," said Antuofermo. "It is so much Hagler that I forget about my family. Today my wife called me again. She was going on a radio show in Boston and she wanted me to talk to the kids. Get out of here. You talk to the kids and it makes you want to see them. I don't want it. I keep saying that to myself. I don't even want it. It takes away mentally and physically from the rest of the stuff.

"That's the way I think. Some people might do different. I try to get away from my family and things, and I try to enjoy what I'm doing. I enjoy this, even though it's hard, I try to enjoy it. I say to myself This is nice.' I believe in good health, anyway. I'm a health freak, and this is the best. Country air. The food, no drinking, no wine. I stay home, I drink the wine. We have no wine, no liquors. This way I keep thinking It's good. It's gonna make me live longer.'

"Like I said, this is the best place I've trained at. I'm calm, I have nothing to worry about. Everything I need is here. I should have come here a month before I did."

Previous training sites for Antuofermo were Miami and Genoa, Italy. Lewis has trained Ayub Kalule, who fights Ray Leonard June 25, and Jorgen Hansen in Copenhagen. "You live in Copenhagen and you won't want to come back," said Lewis, a native Panamanian.

Brown trained Roberto Duran at Grossingers in the Catskills, but his favorite places were Gus Wilson's and Madame Bey's, two New Jersey sites of an earlier era.

"Those were training camps," said Brown. "No women. At eight o'clock everybody went to bed. They worked harder because boxing was the only thing on their minds. They didn't get all that food they get here. Everybody ate the same thing and at the same time, morning and night. Of course, some of them snuck out at night. Tony Janiro was like that. He coulda been a champion with his talent if he had worked harder.

"You got to make up your mind you're going to jail and that's it. The one thing you live on is the guy you're going to fight."

Kutsher's was first used by Ezzard Charles, for both of his fights with Rocky Marciano. Tony DiMarco, Floyd Patterson, Muhammad Ali, George Chuvalo and Willie Pastrano trained here. Leon Spinks trained here before his first fight with Ali. Milt Kutsher, the owner, puts up room, board and gym facility in exchange for the opening of workouts to guests and for all the publicity he can get.

"I stopped doing this years ago because to tell you the truth, I wasn't too crazy about it," said Kutsher. "I took this one for old time's sake."

Television is a way to beat the boredom, the black-and-white sets a concession to the spartan ideal. Braithwaite, a native of Georgetown, Guyana, watched the three-hour Guyana Tragedy' Wednesday night, a story of the mass suicide of the Jim Jones cult. Braithwaite never saw Jonestown.

"You could not get near to Jonestown because they had many guns," said Braithwaite. "There was just one Guyanan living there, an 11- year-old boy. Jim Jones was always in the newspaper for something. Their singing group and basketball team toured Guyana."

After the program Braithwaite said, "I talked to my brother who is in Canada. He say there is talk that Jim Jones is not dead. There is talk he is alive and living in Brazil."

The business of preparing Vito Antuofermo's mind and body to fight Marvin Hagler inches forward with subtly measured progress. At 2 p.m. each day, Antuofermo and Braithwaite enter the ring in the Recreation Hall, Lewis and Brown at the corners. Braithwaite, a southpaw welterweight, dances lightly, flicking his right at Vito's chin-high gloves. Vito feints and feints and slams a left hook into Braithwaite's ribs. The next time he feints the left and steps inside with a straight right to the head.

Each day, Braithwaite reports that Vito's hands are getting quicker, his reflexes more certain. Brown and Lewis don't say much either way. But Vito is short a sparring partner, not getting the ring time he needs, and occasionally short of wind. There is a hint of exasperation. During one workout, Lewis shouts angrily, "Don't show anything Vito," fearing reporters are seeing too much.

Brown has the fight reduced to a nutshell.

"The whole thing is," says Brown, "can my guy reach the other guy? If he does you have a fight, know what I mean. If not, what can you do?"

After the workouts, Vito leaves the hall with a white towel covering his head and a New York Yankees cap on top of the towel. The towel flows behind him as it catches the wind and he looks like Vito of Arabia. His square body and stiff, splayed gait propel him stolidly and he looks neither to the right nor left. The beard and the flattened, scarred face make him seem much older than 28.

"Some fighters have to take more punishment than others," says Brown.

"The hardest I been hit," Vito says, "was by Cyclone Hart. For the first three rounds my head felt like it was spinning all the way around. You know, like the girl in The Exorcist. But he quit on me and I knocked him out in the fifth round.

"Sometimes it looks like I'm getting killed. They used to say the same thing about Jake LaMotta. Like he was getting killed. But Jake knew how to roll with the punch and that punch wouldn't hit him with full effect. That's what I do. I get hit with glancing punches.

"People ask me Don't you get hurt?'. They make me think about it, but myself, I don't think about it. I feel great, I'm sharp mentally, my memory is good. I get a CAT scan after every fight and it seems I'm in perfect shape. So that's the least I worry about."

Every morning he sees that face in the mirror and it reminds him that he was once middleweight champion.

"I definitely miss being champion," says Vito. "People still call me champion and it makes me feel

great. But I want when they call me champion to be sure I am the champion. Sometimes they call me Champ' and I say Don't call me that.' Cause I want to feel I'm a contender and angry enough to get the title. That's what I feel sometimes."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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