

JIM CLEARY



The present-day success of amateur and Golden Gloves boxing in Albuquerque can be traced back to 1951 and an Irishman named Jim Cleary. The transplanted New Yorker started a youth boxing club in the basement of the Old Armory at Fifth and Silver SW, and had among his students a youngster named Bob Foster (Hall of Fame 1975). Until his death in October, 1975, Jim Cleary saw his class grow into clubs throughout the Duke City and

eventually into a A-1 Golden Gloves program. His dedication to youth boxing was unequalled, though it cost him his job at an Albuquerque department store when he refused to cancel a Golden Glove assignment. Jim Cleary was the referee for the state Golden Glove championships for 24 straight years, and called national bouts on numerous occasions.

His interest in boxing started back in New Rochelle, New York, in 1935 as an amateur in the 112-pound class, winning the CYO state title. Eventually, he moved up three weight classes to gain state fame before turning pro in 1939, winning all 14 bouts in New York in the 135-pound division.

He turned to his life-long hobby of officiating the following year before enlisting in the U.S. Navy and coming under the supervision of former world's heavyweight champion Gene Tunney. Jim Cleary spearheaded the very successful ring programs for the Navy in Trinidad, the British West Indies and Miami until his discharge in 1945.

Cleary went to work for New York's State Dept. of Parks, resuming his officiating career. He officiated, during his 40 ring years, bouts involving boxing's Who's Who - Rocky Marciano, Floyd Patterson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Davey Moore, Luis Rodriguez, Sandy Saddler, Curtis Oakes, Ike Williams and Johnny Saxton. In all, Jim Cleary refereed 25 world championship pro bouts, his last being Bob Foster's decision over Pierre Faurie of South Africa here in 1973.

Of all the tributes given Jim Cleary, probably none can equal the accolade offered by a member of one of the city's boxing clubs, "Jim Cleary was a coach, a teacher and father, all wrapped into one, for many of us. He was kind, generous and considerate. He made men out of us. No one can take his place."