

Rev. Al, King

By Manny Topol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Washington — Promoter Don King and civil rights activist the Rev. Al Sharpton were linked to organized crime's infiltration of boxing in testimony yesterday at a U.S. Senate investigations subcommittee hearing. Mob influence led to "predetermined" fights, the committee was told.

King and Sharpton were tied to associates of organized crime families through undercover FBI audio and videotapes, and the testimony of former FBI agent Joseph Spinelli, now New York State inspector general; Michael Franzese, former captain in the Colombo crime family, and a secret witness who testified behind a screen.

Franzese, now serving a four-year term in federal prison for parole violation, also told the subcommittee about hidden mob ownership of fighters — including former middleweight champion Vito Antuofermo — and of his 8 percent ownership of middleweight Davey Moore. Franzese testified that the mob made sure certain fights were "pre-



Sharpton

determined," and often had obtained inside information on major fights — scoring big on bets ranging from \$50,000 to \$100,000.

He said he had such information on the June, 1982, WBC heavyweight title fight between Gerry Cooney and champion Larry Holmes, saying that the mob was "aware of the outcome of that fight in advance through direct information by Gerry Cooney."

"He knew that he just couldn't win that fight and he passed that information along," Franzese said. "He told people close to him to bet against him." Franzese said he placed a large bet on the fight and won \$30,000 when Cooney lost by TKO in the 13th round.

Cooney could not be reached for comment, but Dennis Rappaport, Cooney's co-manager at the time, denies the fighter did anything of the sort.

"If B.S. were poetry, this Franzese guy would be Shakespeare," Rappaport said. "This is unconscionable. It's just plain bull."

Spinelli said he was told in 1981 by Richie Giachetti — former Holmes trainer and more recently the trainer for Mike Tyson — that the November, 1977, Ken Norton-Jimmy Young fight was rigged because one of the judges — from France — was paid off.

Spinelli didn't name the judge, but Ray Baldeyrou of France, scored six of the 15 rounds as even — unusual in the scoring of fight. Norton won the split decision by a slim margin.

Franzese told the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations that Antuofermo was owned by Colombo capo Andrew Russo. Franzese avoided the word "fixed" but said he and other crime family members "were often told in advance what the

Tapes, testimony name both in boxing probe

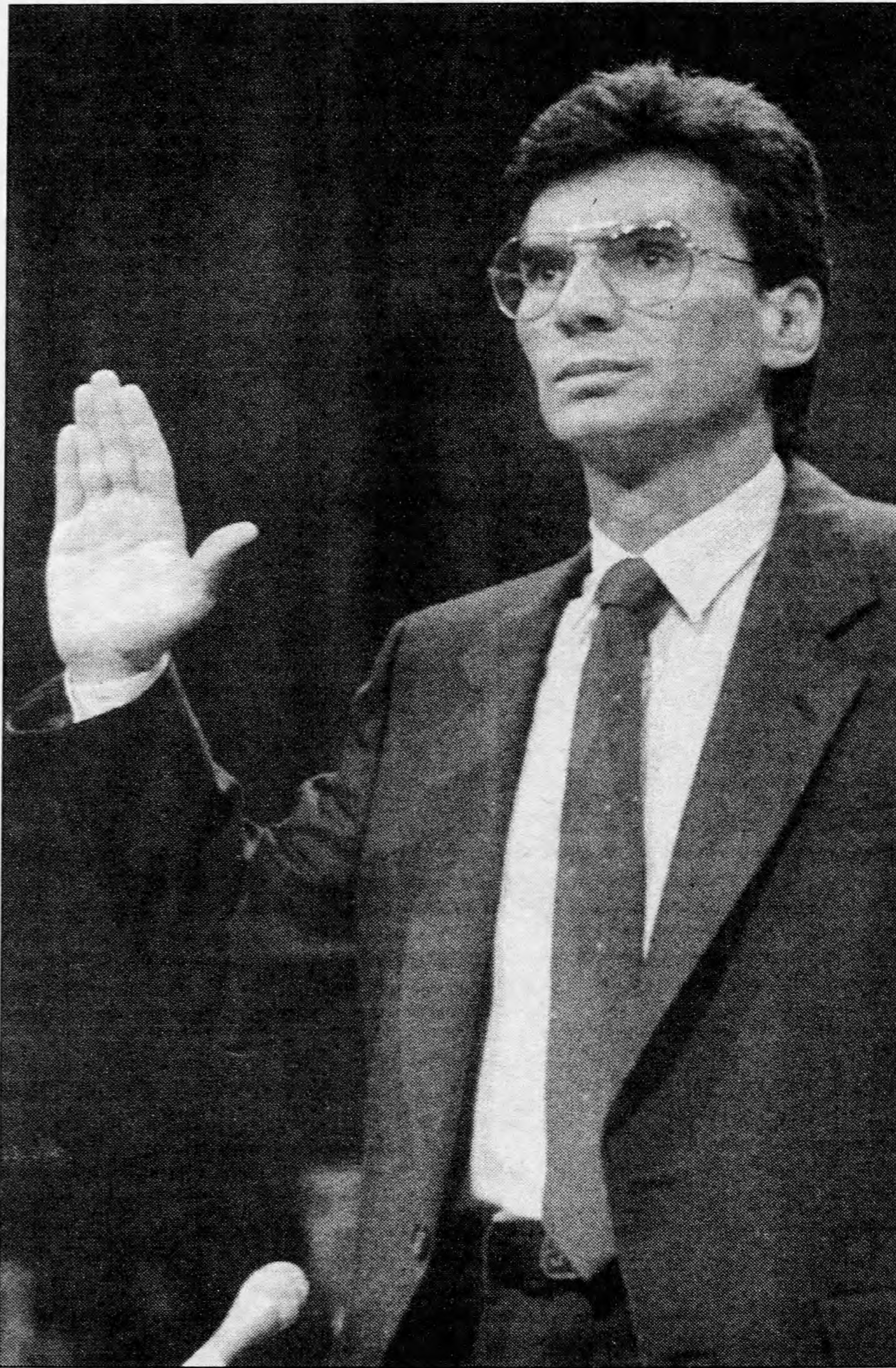


Photo by Annalisa Kraft

Michael Franzese, a former Colombo family member, testifies that fights were 'predetermined' and that the Rev. Al Sharpton and Don King had connections.

Michael Franzese File

Age: 41

Occupation: Owns two movie production companies.

Resides: Federal Correctional Institution in Englewood, Colo.

Immediate Family: Wife Cammy, and three children reside in Los Angeles. Has three other children by a previous marriage. His father is John (Sonny) Franzese, reputedly a major crime figure during the '60s.

Education: Attended Hofstra University. Quit after three years of pre-med.

Joined Mob: Oct. 31, 1975, he says.

Considered the youngest money-maker for the Colombo crime family in the early and mid-1980s. Was a Mafia captain. Made Fortune magazine's 1986 list of the top 50 mobsters.

Prison: Pled guilty in 1986 to federal racketeering and conspiracy charges. Released in May, 1989, after serving 3½ years of a 10-year sentence. Returned to prison in 1991 after admitting to probation and income-tax violations.

Informant: His 1989 testimony helped convict New York sports agent Norby Walters on racketeering charges for illegally signing college athletes to pro contracts.

outcome would be of many of Antuofermo's fights."

"This enabled us to bet successfully on those bouts," Franzese said. "Fifty to \$100,000 were sometimes bet . . ."

He said many of the fights were setups because of mismatches. "I was present . . . when Russo would meet with other managers and fight promoters regarding Antuofermo's opponents," he said. "The bouts would be arranged and certain family members would be assured of the outcome."

Franzese, wearing a dark suit and glasses, was accompanied by U.S. marshals. The committee, headed by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), is looking into corruption and organized crime influence in boxing. A bill has been introduced in the Senate to create a federal boxing commission.

Spinelli and Franzese testified about the FBI's 1983 undercover operation, "Crown Cola," in which FBI agents posed as drug dealers trying to launder drug money through a bogus boxing promotion company — TKO Promotions. The agents let it be known in boxing circles that they were willing to spend \$3 million on fight promotions and that they had millions of dollars on account in an Illinois bank.

The sting operation targeted King, and eventually four organized crime families got involved, along with King and Sharpton, in an effort to get the company set up. The operation was disbanded, with no indictments, when the FBI canceled the funding.

Also, according to the tapes and the secret witness, IBF president Bob Lee was accused of taking a \$3,000 bribe in 1981 to facilitate the granting of a New Jersey promoters license. Lee appeared before the subcommittee but refused to answer questions about the allegations and invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. He later told reporters he was innocent of the allegations.

Franzese said he brought Sharpton into the scheme because of Sharpton's association with Danny Pagano, a soldier in the Genovese crime family. The undercover FBI films, revealed publicly for the first time, shows Sharpton sitting next to Pagano, telling him that King had extraordinary power in controlling ratings of fighters and discussing a fighter, saying, "Don will know how to move him."

Franzese said, "I knew Sharpton . . . was associated with people in the Genovese family." Sharpton set up a meeting with Franzese, King, Sharpton and one of the undercover FBI agents.

Franzese said he attended a meeting in 1976 of the late Paul Castellano, then head of the Gambino crime family; Thomas DiBella, head of the Colombo family, and King.

"[They] berated him regarding certain business dealings," Franzese said. ". . . It involved King's knowing the outcome of fights in advance because he owned both fighters. I also remember DiBella saying that King assured him that the families would not lose any money on whatever deals they had going together."

Sharpton, who is seeking the New

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Tied to Mob

Manager: Claims Are 'Bull'

By Roger Rubin
STAFF WRITER

Gerry Cooney's former manager categorically denied the testimony yesterday of a former member of an organized crime family that the fighter influenced the outcome of his June, 1982, title fight against Larry Holmes.

Michael Franzese, a former captain of the Colombo crime family serving four years for parole violation, testified at a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on boxing that before the bout — which Holmes won by a 13th-round TKO — Cooney had told him he would lose. Franzese said he wagered and won \$30,000 on the fight. But Dennis Rappaport, Cooney's co-manager at the time, insists Cooney did nothing to jeopardize the integrity of the bout.

"If B.S. were poetry, this Franzese guy would be Shakespeare," said Rappaport, who runs a promotion company and sponsors heavyweight Tim Witherspoon. "This is unconscionable. It's just plain bull. It sounds like the words of a guy who is grasping at straws, who has no grasp of reality. He must want to be a front-page story."

"Cooney had the opportunity to be the richest athlete in all of sports at the time because it was the biggest grossing sporting event in history," Rappaport said. "And money wasn't the most important thing. He had a chance to be the heavyweight champion — that was the most important thing to him."

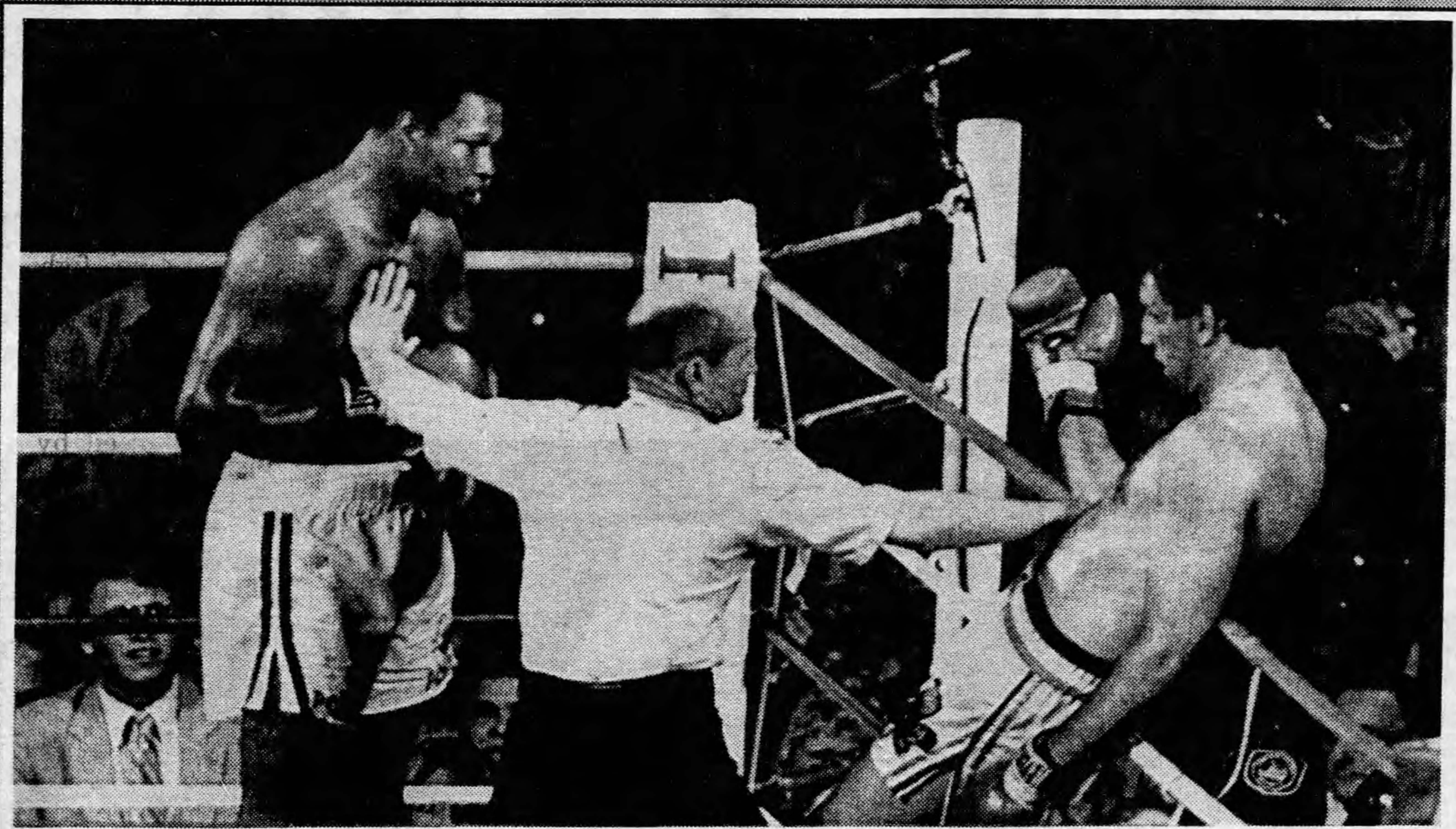
Rappaport cited the storied depression Cooney underwent following the fight as further evidence. "Gerry was devastated," Rappaport said. "He became a recluse for months after the fight. It was like he was in mourning."

Cooney, who could not be reached for comment yesterday, was trailing by a slim margin on all three judges' scorecards after the 12th round. Late in the 13th, referee Mills Lane was ready to give a standing eight count when Cooney hit the ropes after a barrage of rights and lefts from Holmes, but Cooney's trainer, Victor Valle, stepped into the ring.

"If this guy is inferring he was planning to take a dive in that fight, [that] just wouldn't happen," Rappaport said.

In addition to listing the physical circumstances of the fight, Rappaport said he'd never even heard of Franzese. "Gerry and I had an open and candid relationship at that time and I've never even heard that man's name," he said. "I don't know if they ever just bumped into each other, but he was not someone that Gerry fraternized with."

"Cooney was a sincere and dedicated fighter," Rappaport said. "He wanted nothing more than to win that fight, to be the champ. He made every effort to win that bout, and to sleaze his name is disgraceful."



Referee Mills Lane pushes Larry Holmes away after the champion sent Gerry Cooney falling into the ropes with a flurry of punches in the 13th round. Moments later Cooney's trainer, Victor Valle, threw in the towel.

The Fights In Question

Cooney vs. Holmes

What: Heavyweight Championship of the World between challenger Gerry Cooney (25-0) and WBC champion Larry Holmes (39-0).

Where: Caesars Palace (Outdoor), Las Vegas.

When: Friday, June 11, 1982.

How It Ended: Holmes wins a technical knockout at 2:52 of 13th round when Cooney's trainer, Victor Valle, jumps into the ring.

Judging: Judges Duane Ford and Dave Moretti had the fight scored 113-111 in favor of Holmes with Cooney winning six of the rounds. The third judge, Jerry Roth, had it Holmes 115-109 with Cooney winning four rounds. The Associated Press had the fight scored 8-4 in rounds for Holmes when the fight was stopped. In addition, several points had been taken away from Cooney for low blows.

Young vs. Norton

What: Heavyweight fight between Jimmy Young (22-5-2) and Ken Norton (39-3). The winner, it is decreed by the WBC, gets a shot at champion Muhammad Ali.

Where: Sports Pavilion, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas.

When: Nov. 5, 1977.

How It Ended: Norton wins a split decision.

Judging: Judges Jim Rondeau and Ray Baldeyrou wound up with 147-143 scores for Norton although they differed on rounds. Judge Art Lurie had Young winning, 144-142. They were in full agreement on only four of the first 14 rounds. The fight was so close that Baldeyrou called six rounds even, Rondeau five and Lurie one.

Vito Says He Never Took a Dive

By Wendell Jamieson
STAFF WRITER

Vito Antuofermo says he never took a dive — and he's got the scars to prove it.

"If you see me, you know I never threw a fight," Antuofermo said in an interview from his Howard Beach home yesterday. "But I don't have as many scars as I did before. They just disappeared or something."

The name of the 40-year-old former middleweight champion — who says he's gearing for a comeback — popped up yesterday at a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing when Michael Franzese, a former captain in the Colombo crime family, said Antuofermo



Vito Antuofermo

was involved in fights in which the conclusions were predetermined.

Antuofermo admits meeting Franzese in the bars and gyms where fighters hang out and train. "I knew him, but I didn't have anything to do with him. I met him a couple of times in the bar. He'd say, 'How you doin'? When are you fightin'?' I knew who he was. But this is the first time my name was mentioned in a case like this."

Antuofermo has known other alleged and convicted mobsters — including his neighbor, jailed Gambino crime family boss John Gotti. "One night I was having dinner, and Mr. John Gotti was there, and I went over to shake hands with him."

But Antuofermo, who also is trying to launch a movie career, said he fought every fight to win — and so did his opponents.

"No one ever told me to take a dive or anything," he said. "Every fight I lost, I lost because I was cut."

His brother, Nicky, who laughed at the suggestion that his brother was

controlled by the mob, agreed: "His scars on his face prove that he never was in a fixed fight."

Antuofermo's record supports his defense: In his 50-7-2 career record, facial abrasions contributed to five of his losses. Only once, he said, did he think a fight was fixed: In March, 1980, when he lost his middleweight crown to Alan Minter. That fight was given to Minter by the judges, but Antuofermo believes they were paid off.

"If anything, Minter's people fixed the judges," he said.

Antuofermo continued to fight until he lost a 1981 bout by TKO to Marvellous Marvin Hagler. He came back in 1984 and won four in a row before being stopped by current contender Matthew Hilton.

Now, he's trying his hands at acting. But he may be getting typecast. So far, he has appeared in "The Freshman," a mob comedy starring Marlon Brando; as a bodyguard in "The Godfather III"; and in Martin Scorsese's mob movie opus, "Goodfellas."

McGirt Says Manager Not A Criminal

By Robert Cassidy

NEWSDAY SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Buddy McGirt, the WBC welterweight champion, has a lot on his mind these days. The least of which, however, is his 10-round, non-title bout tomorrow night in Atlantic City.

McGirt is scheduled to tune up against Oscar Ponce at Trump Plaza but spent yesterday talking about anything but Ponce. His first priority was to refute a report that he and manager Al Certo had ties to organized crime.

"That's crazy," said McGirt, a Long Islander from Brentwood. "It's like Don King says, 'There ain't no black guys in the Mafia.' They aren't paying my bills and they aren't giving me protection."

A 1985 report issued by the New Jersey Commission of Investigation, which was read Tuesday before a Senate subcommittee investigating boxing, stated that Certo was an associate of the Genovese crime family.

"Let me ask you this," McGirt said, in defense of his manager. "Just because you meet a gangster on the street, does that make you a gangster, too?"

McGirt, 28, then switched gears to money. In June, he lost a potentially huge paycheck, along with the opportunity to fight Terry Norris, when Certo and HBO couldn't agree on a purse. HBO offered McGirt \$1 million, but Certo held out for more and HBO backed off. McGirt is now looking at an October date at Madison Square Garden against mandatory challenger Genaro Leon or IBF welterweight champion Maurice Blocker. But those fights would earn him a pittance compared to what he would get if he fought the winner of the Sept. 12 WBC showdown between super lightweights Julio Cesar Chavez and Hector Camacho.

"If they find the heart to move up to 147 pounds, we'll get it on," said McGirt. "Those two sissies couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper bag. Everyone writes what a great fighter Chavez is. Chavez is not a great fighter. Neither of them are great fighters."

Finally, McGirt got around to Ponce, an Argentine who no one would dare accuse of being a great fighter. He lost three of four fights last year.

"I can't describe his style because I don't know it," said McGirt. "The only thing I know about any opponent I face is that he's trying to take away my gusto. When I get into the ring, I kick butt and take names later."

Rev. Al, King Linked to Mob In Testimony

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York Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate, has been linked to organized crime in the past. In 1988, New York Newsday revealed Sharpton had business dealings with Matthew Ianiello, then a reputed member of the Genovese crime family, in an attempt to win a lucrative garbage collection contract with the Consolidated Edison Co. In 1985, Newsday reported Sharpton's participation in the FBI sting operation and his association with **Franchise**.

Yesterday, Sharpton told The Associated Press that he was unaware his name would surface in the hearings.

"It's from when they tried to sting us," he said. "They couldn't make a case . . ."

King said Spinelli and the FBI "spent five years doing an exhaustive investigation on me [that led] to no charges related to organized crime involvement."

However, in a deposition taken by committee staff members, King invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer all questions.

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