The title dream endures

CARMEN BASILIO

WILLIAMSON — The 63-year-old man in the light red sport coat is puffing on yet another Winston, puffing furiously right-down to the filter. He's talking about the old days, the grand days when he ruled the world in his chosen field, the days when his flat stomach rippled with muscle, when his face frequently gushed blood, when he wouldn't have dreamed of even touching a Winston.

"I was on vacation the whole time," says the man in the light red coat. "I was doing what I loved, and you know what I say? It's never work if you're doing what you love, no matter how tired you get. Doing something you don't like, that's work."

The journey to the past, though, skids to a halt. The man in the light red coat is here in Williamson, 65 miles northwest of Syracuse, to help sell automobiles.

And this kid, a car salesman, won't quit bugging him. The kid, wearing a paisley tie and cowboy boots, three times pokes the man in the light red coat in the ribs.

By DAVID RAMSEY
Champ's vision lives on

*BASILIO
Continued from Page E1

"Heh, heh, heh," says the kid car salesman.
The man in the light red coat returns to his conversation.
But there's another poke. Another "heh, heh, heh."
Enough, finally, is enough.
The man in the light red coat whirls, he un-leashes a right jab aimed straight for the kid's chin.
The kid raises his hands to stop...nothing.
The right, you see, is a decoy. At that instant, a left hook soars straight out of 1955, a left thrown with power and grace, a left that whistles at the kid's mustache.
Just when you start envisioning the kid dropping to the floor, his face a mess, the left stops millimeters short of its target.
The kid's eyes are huge. The man in the light red coat returns his artillery to his pockets. This time, he does the laughing.
"Got you," says Carmen Basilio, the man in the light red coat, the man who will be inducted Sunday into Canastota's International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Basilio's career in brief

A look at Carmen Basilio's boxing career:

April 2, 1927: Basilio is born in Canastota.
1946: He turns pro after winning the Herald-Journal sponsored Golden Gloves tournament.
1948: He fights 15 bouts — eight in Syracuse — over the course of the year. He earns a total of $1,305.
1950-51: Basilio contacts mononucleosis, struggles with it for two years and loses eight of 16 bouts.
Sept. 18, 1953: He fights Kid Gavilan for world welterweight title at the War Memorial. He knocks down the champion with two lefts in the second round. Gavilan had been knocked down only once before in his 112-fight career. But the Kid recovered, closed Basilio's left eye with repeated punches and won in a split decision. "Had Carmen Basilio's steamboat broken?"
One of Basilio's favorite nicknames for himself is "Old Cementhed."
basilio told dejohn about his vision, about the title. 

"ah," said dejohn, "that's not crazy. it could happen."

it did.

during the mid-30's, basilio was known as the most fearless fighters. he had this vision, says 39-year-old ray arcu, who has followed boxing since the days of jack dempsey. "in every field of endeavor, someone perceives, suddenly, you discover that the world is out there for the taking."

basilio's vision was of the world. he saw himself fighting for the world championship. he dreamed of winning.

basilio turned pro in 1948 after winning the hercules oil sponsored golden gloves tournament. he was convinced he would soon win the world title. he had this vision of himself.

the vision sustained him through seven years, many of them long and lonely. he was at the atollite plant, assembling generators. he could make enough money as a boxer to support himself.

one of his co-workers - one of those smart-aleck types, says basilio - asked him, "you're a fighter?"

"yes," said basilio.

"when you gonna wise up and quit?"

never, said basilio.

"why?"

"i figure i'm going to be champ of the world, said basilio.

"he walked away like i was some kind of nut," says basilio, sitting in his head nearly 40 years later.

others told basilio he was a bum, destined for nothing. they said he couldn't fight.

"somehow, the vision endured."

on aug. 21, 1952, basilio was sitting on a train, his scrawny eyes closed. he was blinking his vision. oh, his punches were landing with savage power. his opponent was swaying, ready to drop. the train attendant, recognizing his name, the name of a boxer who had lost the night before, the name

basilio looks downgrandfatherly in his striped tie with the marine corps tie tack. he wears a pair of steel-rimmed glasses, and his white line is continuing its slow retreat. he walks slowly, his hearing isn't what it was. he asks frequently.

but on this afternoon, it's the

photograph of pictures of his life. there is a cherry red geo storm. salesmen, including the kid in cowboy boots, work the crowd. it's a high-scoring game.

but the real action is off in a corner, where a vcr box and a sign in the television displays grainy flickering black-and-white images. the tape is playing carmen's greatest hits.

at this moment, a graceful man with a fancy haircut tosses punch bags at basilio. the man looks like a giant, though he is only 5 feet 11. the man is ray robinson. it's sept. 23, 1957, the greatest night of basilio's life. basilio, all 5-foot-6 of him, is fighting in yankee stadium for the middleweight championship of the world.

"robinson is loaded with confidence," bars the tape's play-byplay man. "basilio has to unload his murderous punch!"

the present-day basilio wanders in the scull crowd. he's munching on a chocolate doughnut and drinking black coffee.

a friendly, unpretentious man, basilio has the enigmatic charm of a good detective. he's not a co-worker. he's not a boxing ring. he's not a coach. he's an elder man named wess in the game of life.

"hey," he mumbles, his mouth full as he points at the black-and-white image of himself. "i know that guy!"

just then, robinson plasters basilio with a right. basilio falls to the ground and his head white head snaps back. nearly 33 years after the punch, the present-day basilio flinches, rubbing his head.

"hey, don't do that," he yells. he looks at the auto show and see the shadow of the ring.

"can't you see me, ah? can't you see me, ah? watch me. watch me."

the present-day basilio says, "no, mister. i can't." he's laughing. he's not a co-worker. he's not a ring. he's not a coach. he's an elder man named wess in the game of life.

"can't you see me, ah? um, i can't."

he's laughing. he's not a co-worker. he's not a ring. he's not a coach. he's an elder man named wess in the game of life.

basilio is sitting at the ring, watching the vcr box. he turns to the ring. he turns to the vcr box. it's a high-scoring game.

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Kid Gavilan

Born Gerardo Gonzalez in Cuba, Gavilan eventually found his way to the United States, where his aggressive and showy style endeared him to American fight crowds. In 1951, Gavilan outpointed Johnny Bratton to win the American welterweight title and gained international recognition for the title vacated by Sugar Ray Robinson with a decision over Billy Graham. After six successful title defenses, including a decision over Carmen Basilio in 1953, Gavilan attempted to move up in weight class, but was unsuccessful in trying to take the middleweight crown from Bobo Olson in 1954. Later that year, Johnny Saxton defeated Gavilan on points to unseat Gavilan as world welterweight champion. Gavilan retired four years later with a record of 107-30-6.

Emile Griffith

World welterweight champion, April 1, 1961 - Sept. 20, 1961
March 24, 1962 - March 21, 1963
June 8, 1963 - April 25, 1966

Born in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Griffith moved to New York City as a child. After less than three years as a professional, he won his first world championship by knocking out Benny "Kid" Paret in the 13th round. He and Paret were swapped title twice; in their third confrontation, Paret was again knocked out, lapsed into a coma and eventually died. In March 1963, Griffith lost the title to Luis Rodriguez, but defeated Rodriguez later to reclaim the title. He relinquished his welterweight title when he moved to the middleweight division in 1966. On April 25, he defeated Dick Tiger to claim the middleweight championship. A year later, he lost the title to Italy's Nino Benvenuti on points.

Jake LaMotta

World middleweight champion, Apr. 25, 1960 - Apr. 17, 1967

Born in New York City in July, 1921, LaMotta learned the boxing trade in reform school. He fought the legendary Ray Robinson six times in his career, and defeated him once. Their second meeting — Feb. 5, 1943 — resulted in Robinson's first loss in 41 fights. LaMotta appeared before the Kefauver Senate committee that was investigating boxing. In the late 1940s, and admitted he intentionally lost to Billy Fox by technical knockout in Nov. 1947 to gain a shot at the middleweight title. LaMotta fought for that title on June 16, 1949 and stopped Marcel Cerdan in 10 rounds to get it. He held the crown until Robinson, then the welterweight champion, challenged LaMotta for the middleweight title on Feb. 14, 1951, in what would be dubbed the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre." Robinson took LaMotta's crown by TKO. LaMotta retired with a record of 83-15-4.

Joe Louis

Middleweight champion, June 18, 1940 - Feb. 14, 1951

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Heavyweight champion, Sept. 23, 1952 - April 27, 1956

Born in Brooklyn, Mass., Marciano's fame rested on the fact that he was the only heavyweight champion to retire undefeated. Small for a heavyweight, Marciano got by on stamina, strength and durability. He won the heavyweight title Sept. 23, 1952 by knocking out Jersey Joe Walcott in the 13th round of his 43rd professional fight. The year before, he knocked out 37-year-old Joe Louis, who had been Marciano's idol. Marciano successfully defended his crown six times. His most memorable bouts included his title-winner with Walcott, when Marciano got off the canvas from a first-round knockdown. Marciano was also dropped in a fight with Archie Moore, but shook off the blow and came back to defeat Moore. It was Marciano's final bout. He retired in 1956. Marciano won all 49 of his fights, 43 of which did not go the distance. He died in a plane crash in 1969.
Born in Cuba in 1940, Naples earned the nickname "Manoquilla," which translated means "smooth as butter." Naples won the welterweight title twice, the first time in 1969. He lost the title to Canastota's Billy Backus in four rounds, when the bout was held at the Ondondaga County War Memorial. But six months later, he reclaimed the belt from Backus by stopping the Central New Yorker in the eighth round in Ingleside, Calif.

In 1973, he fought Carlos Monzon for the middleweight title, but was stopped by Monzon in seven rounds. Naples still held the welterweight crown, though he lost that title to John H. Stracey in 1975. He retired, at age 38, after that defeat.

Born in Hartford, Conn., Pep is considered by many to be the finest featherweight in history. He turned professional in July 1940 and won 62 straight fights, including the featherweight championship at age 20 when he defeated Chalkey Wright in 15 rounds.

Pep served in World War II, then was injured in a plane crash in January 1947. Despite the injury, he came back to successfully defend his title against Jack Leslie that summer. Pep, who once had a string of 73 fights without a loss, lost the featherweight title in 1948 to Sandy Saddler. The two would trade the title before Saddler claimed it for good in September 1951.

Pep retired in 1959, but came back in 1965 to win nine fights before retiring in 1966. During his career, he won 229 matches and lost 11.

Born in Boston in June 1926, Sadler was stopped by Jock Leslie in 15 rounds in Sadler's second professional fight. The blow would prove to be the only time in Sadler's career he would suffer a loss by knockout. From there, Sadler came to be known as perhaps the greatest knockout-punching lightweight champion in history.

He floored Willie Pep in four rounds on Oct. 29, 1948 to win the world featherweight crown. Pep won the title back in February 1949 but after another rematch — this one in September of 1950 — Sadler secured the title from Pep. Sadler served in the Army in 1952 and 53, then resumed his career. In 1956, he had a passenger in a taxicab that was involved in an accident. Sadler sustained an eye injury and retired in January 1957 as featherweight champion.

During his career, his record of 144-16-2 included 103 knockouts.
After years of hard work, dreamer gets the job done
Boxing Hall of Fame to induct first class

By Jacques Thomas
Staff Writer

Randy Gordon has seen them come and go.

The brilliant plans to establish the world's first boxing hall of fame rose and fell like the passing of the days, said the New York state boxing commissioner.

"Boxing people are dreamers," Gordon, also an ex-editor of Ring Magazine and part-time boxing television analyst.

"But a lot of them are not doers.

"I can't tell you how many people have come up to us (the and Ring editor Burt Sugar) and said, 'We're starting up a boxing hall of fame in' — you fill in the city," he added.

But, he said, Ed Brophy was different.

While most visited Gordon once, Brophy came back again and again, each time with something new — a photo of the land it would be built on, a drawing of the proposed building and then a shot of the finished product.

Now, Gordon, along with other boxing fans, can rest assured. The International Boxing Hall of Fame opened last year in Canastota. And Brophy, a one-time amateur fighter and the man behind the hall, has the filled-up time cards to prove it.

At 1 p.m. Sunday, the hall will take its next step in a young life as it inducts its first hall of fame members — 50 in all — during a ceremony at the hall's site just off New York State Thruway exit 34.

On this day, a full week before the four-day festivities begin, Brophy was busy. He has worked 12-hour days, seven days a week. But it's all worth it, he said.

The phone rang at least every three minutes as he carefully stripped protective paper from a newly ordered glass display case.

There, he would place the boxing trunks that Floyd Patterson wore when he defeated Archie Moore for the heavyweight crown just vacated by Rocky Marciano in 1956. Marciano retired that year and became the only heavyweight to retire undefeated.

In the museum's other wing, Brophy carefully positioned the mouthpieces of the greats, including a dentist's mold of former champ Mike Tyson's chomp.

It all takes on special meaning, said Brophy, especially when Canastota boxing hero and 1970-71 welterweight champ Billy Backus was your next-door neighbor.

And Backus was the nephew of another Canastota great, Carmen Basilio, who twice held the welterweight crown and once wore the middleweight belt between 1953-58.

"Basically, I was always a fight fan," said Brophy. "Boxing has always been my first love more than any other sport.

"I was always around the fight game," he added.

But it started with running track in high school. While training for the team, Brophy would run into Backus frequently while he trained for fights. The two began to run together, and because Backus would often go the gym, one thing led to another, Brophy said.

"Seeing Billy train and get up in the morning doing his roadwork kind of inspired me to follow behind him," said Brophy. "I'd go to the gym and, the next thing you know, I found myself in the ring.

Brophy's career was brief. He finished with a 9-5 record and decided to try the sport from another angle.

Soon, while still a teenager, he began traveling throughout the East Coast and to California and Las Vegas with Backus to help him train. Later, he became a manager, then a promoter, and finally, he became a collector and historian.

"Somehow, through the years, I've been fortunate enough to be close and experience all the different aspects of boxing," said the 33-year-old. "It seemed to be a natural thing when the Hall of Fame effort was getting under way that perhaps some of the different committee people felt I might be the person to work on it on a full-time basis."

INDUCTION WEEKEND

Here's a list of events for this weekend at the Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota:

Friday
7 p.m.: Hall of Fame weekend kickoff party, Graziano's Restaurant in Canastota.
8 p.m.: Boxing fights featuring Tracy Patterson.
Saturday
6 a.m. - 10 a.m.: Boxing Collector's convention, Graziano's Restaurant.
6 p.m.: Inductees gather at Graziano's for group photo.
7 p.m.: Banquet of Champions, Rusty Hall $75 per person.
Sunday
Noon - Press conference, Graziano's Restaurant.
1-2 p.m: Induction ceremonies, outside, east of the Hall of Fame.
4 p.m.: Parade through Canastota, beginning at St. Agatha's Church, ending at the American Legion Field.

Throughout the weekend, the Hall of Fame will be open from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Former champions and inductees will be visiting the museum intermittently.

BOXING LUMINARIES will converge on the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota this weekend for the induction of the Hall's first class of honorees.

VISITORS to the Boxing Hall of Fame will find a collection of memorabilia and exhibits honoring the greats of the game.

That was in 1984. Now the museum, which features life-sized statues of Canastota's two boxing greats — Basilio and Backus — is gaining momentum on its route to what it hopes is a knockout performance on Sunday, said Brophy.

"The timing was perfect," said Brophy, who credited the hall's committee with its success. "To me, the Hall of Fame was meant to be in Canastota for several reasons. The long history of boxing, a village that cares about boxing and it's in the middle of the state."

And, said boxing commissioner Gordon, Brophy should take a well-deserved bow.

"It was like he was born to set up this Hall of Fame," said Gordon. "He should be real proud of the job he's done."