

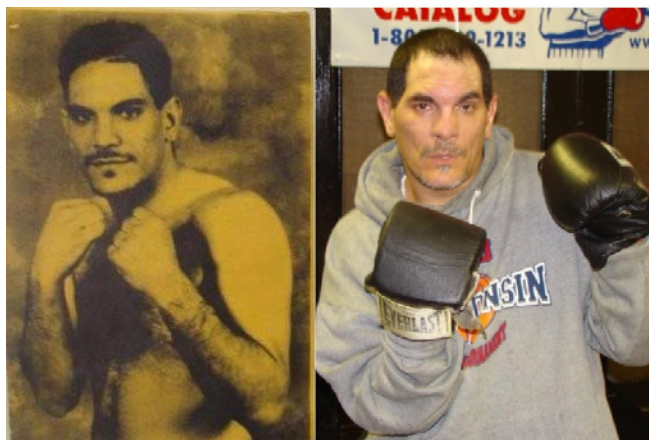
Nelson Hernandez

Custodian, Custodial Services

by Joseph S. Spence, Sr.

Nelson Hernandez should be called "Fearless Hernandez" for many reasons. First, he did not hesitate to step into the ring with a higher ranking fighter when "thrown to the wolves." Second, he performed his best. Next, he showed strength and determination while fighting like a champ. Finally, he held the golden gloves championship for Wisconsin from 1982 to 1984.

The former Wisconsin Golden Gloves Champion Hernandez was born in Puerto Rico. Inspired by two of his uncles, and also two of his best friends, he stepped into the ring at age 15, weighting 115 pounds, and completed 37 fights as a Bantamweight. Hernandez eventually came to Milwaukee and trained with Israel Costa at the United Community Center (UCC).



Nelson Hernandez: The Champ (left) and now

"Costa is a mentor and like a father to me," Hernandez says. He currently assists Costa with the kids at UCC because of his love for boxing, his respect for Costa, and his desire to see the kids succeed. He is inspired by Costa's record of training great fighters, such as Hector Colon, who eventually became a national champion.

Hernandez entered professional boxing at age 22. His achievement record spans the spectrum of completing 33 professional fights as a junior welterweight at 139 pounds, three fights as a welterweight at 147 pounds, and two fights as a junior middleweight at 155 pounds.

"My training was very strict," Hernandez reflects. "My road work would begin around 4:00 a.m., starting with running, shadow boxing, sparring, sit-ups, jump rope, bags and pads," he adds. "The training normally ends around 7:00 p.m., and I was not allowed to eat anything after 7:30 p.m. because of my diet."

Most of his fights were tough because he was always fighting greater boxers. "The toughest fight I ever had was against Leonard Townsend of Chicago, who ranked 10th in the world," Hernandez states. "I went ten rounds with him."

Hernandez has worked with great trainers such as Al Mooreland and Eddie Brooks in Milwaukee. He is inspired by Sugar Ray Robinson, Robert Durand, Mohammed Ali, and Larry Holmes. He met and shook hands with Mohammed Ali in 1985. Hernandez has fought

professionally in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minnesota, and Canada. His last fight was with Chad Brisson in 2002, a Canadian champion.

"Boxing has been a saving grace for me," Hernandez reflects. "It has kept me out of trouble." Several of his friends have faced legal problems, and did not fare well. "Some were committed to the criminal justice system, and have problems with law enforcement," he adds.



Nelson Hernandez and Dad

Hernandez retired from boxing at age 35. "The income was not sufficient to sustain me and my family," he affirms. Since 2004, he has worked as a custodian at UWM, helping other staff on various floors of the Bolton Hall. Additionally, he trains and mentors Angelo, a light heavyweight currently attending UWM.

Because Hernandez was taken advantaged of during his boxing career by promoters and managers who withheld financial information from him, he doesn't want Angelo to "become a victim of the system as

I have." Hernandez stresses, "I would like him to have the benefit of my firsthand experience as he progresses in his career."

Hernandez would like upcoming boxers, including Angelo, to know that boxing is not what it appears to be on television. There are many behind-the-scene actions that are not shown. Younger fighters should not be naive and be aware that they may be taken advantaged of because of all the money floating across the table. Based on his firsthand experience, Hernandez asserts, "Things would have been different if I had the knowledge back then that I have now."

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Fall 2009