

# CAUGHT IN THE MOMENT

Peter Lerner talks to a man who has carved his own identity in boxing

**F**ROM Ali standing enraged over a prone Sonny Liston in Lewiston to Don King's hair, from James J. Braddock upsetting the odds to Mike Tyson groping around on the canvas for his gumshield, or from the tragic death of Mitch Halpern to Joe Cortez clucking like a startled old hen as he moves in to break a clinch, we know so much about the characters, the immortal moments, the stories and the glories of our sport. To followers of boxing, some of its protagonists can seem more familiar than people from our own lives while some of its moments – from the ridiculous to the sublime – are perhaps more easily conjured up by the mind's eye than some of our own memories. Yet the men who freeze these moments, through whose eyes we usually see the sport, more often than not remain nameless to us. Unlike the fighters, trainers, promoters and referees, the

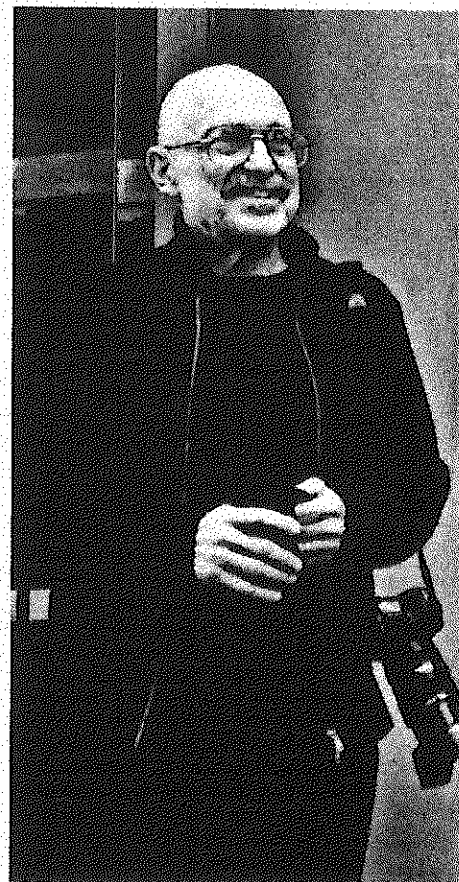
**'I shoot from ringside but want to say some other things'**

boxing photographer is an elusive figure in the minds of most fans.

Howard Schatz is amongst the most important photographers in boxing today. The promotional photos of the Super Six fighters (which have done so much to give the tournament a clear and recognisable image) are the creation of Schatz, as are the official photos for the Super Four bantamweight tournament and the Pacquiao-Mosley fight. Other photographs – such as last year's February 5 cover of Andre Ward or the stark shot of Teddy Atlas's scar, which accompanied the 2010 feature on the trainer/commentator – have appeared in *Boxing News* or on many of the leading boxing websites.

Schatz is a different type of photographer, interested in a different type of image: "Now, I go to ringside, I shoot from ringside – but so do 500 other photographers. I've done that but I also want to say some other things. One of the reasons my work is getting the attention it gets is because I'm not a sports photographer, I'm a studio photographer. I control the lighting, I control the pose, the perspective, the composition. I want to make something new. I don't want to just document what's there."

That striving to try new things is one of the qualities that marks Schatz's work. As Ron Scott Stevens, the former New York State Athletic Commissioner who helped introduce Schatz into the world of prizefighting, puts it, "He's doing innovative things, things other photographers aren't doing. You can find him there, perched outside a dressing room in the Bronx taking photos of the boxers before and after their fights

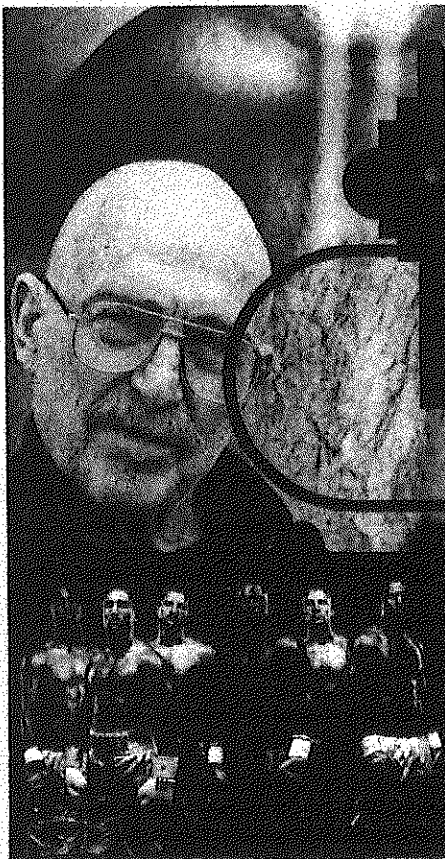


**MAN OF MANY TALENTS:** Schatz has gone from being a leading retina expert to top snapper

to see the effect of the fight on their face. Nobody else is doing anything like that."

Those before and after photos were taken around New York in the first half of 2008 and featured fighters such as Pawel Wolak, Andrey Tsurkan, Jesse Feliciano and Cecilio Santos, all of whom were linked by telltale signs of a hard fistfight: damp, ruffled hair, swollen faces, spilt eyebrows, and the eyes themselves – sad in the case of the losers, just plain wild in the case of Wolak. Schatz picked up the second prize in the Sports Features section of the illustrious World Press Photo awards for those images.

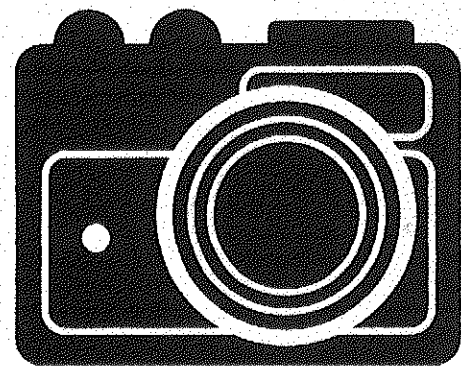
As well as the various work he's done with Showtime, Schatz has devoted himself for the last few years to his driving passion – a mammoth project in which he has interviewed and photographed countless boxing figures for a book to be entitled *At The Fights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing*. Almost everybody seems to be in there, from big guns like Manny Pacquiao, Bernard Hopkins and Sergio Martinez and ex-fighters like Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson to boxing figures such as Angelo Dundee and Bob Arum. The pictures for this project, many of which can be seen on his website, make up the bulk of Schatz's boxing output and are characterised by Schatz's special, uncanny ability to home in on what is distinctive about each subject. So we have Angelo Dundee, the man who orchestrated wins over Sugar Ray Robinson, Sonny Liston, Joe Frazier, George Foreman, Roberto Duran, Tommy Hearns and Marvin Hagler, with all the gravity of a living totem. Lou Duva is there, sat



**SUPER SIX:** Schatz captures the starry line-up of Showtime's innovative tournament

## ▲ 'There's something wonderful about boxers, even the mean sons of bitches'

with fists clenched, still with that same streak of belligerence in his eyes at almost 90 years old as when he was brawling with fellow soldiers back in his army days. You can see Vic Darchinyan – who Schatz describes as "a tough little son of a gun" – throwing hooks with a rabid dog expression or Kassim Quma working the speedbag, the tracer fire-like images of his gloves and the arc of the speedbag harking back to that period from 2003 to 2005 when his rapid-fire volume punching



made him one of the most attractive fighters around. Thomas Hauser, also featured in the book, is spot on when he says: "Howard is doing a visual interpretation of the sport, showing in particular the strength, the speed and the motion. He really captures the fluidity and the motion. He is trying to show the essence of boxing."

This is not the first time Howard has excelled in his chosen field. Lee Jampol is the former Head of Ophthalmology at North Western University in Chicago and this is what he has to say about the photographer. "Howard is unique in my experience because he's the only person I know who has been world class – really world class – in two entirely different areas." For Howard Schatz the photographer previously worked for over 20 years as Dr Howard Schatz M.D. the retina specialist. Jampol, himself a leading retina expert, believes Schatz "was definitely one of the top 10 people in the world in his field."

In 1987 he started devoting more time to his passion for photography and found he started getting a lot of attention for his work. In 1995 he decided to take a year off work and go to New York with his wife Beverly to pursue his passion full

time. As he explains: "We're on this earth once and we don't get lots of chances. I have the other part of me, this other side of my brain, that wanted to say something else and make images."

That one-year experiment soon became a permanent choice.

His first experience of boxing came in January of 2006 after he had been put in contact with Stevens with the intention of taking some photographs at the weigh-in and from ringside. And what an introduction it was: Madison Square Garden for the war between O' Neil Bell and Jean-Marc Mormeck – the first unification of the cruiserweight titles in almost 18 years since Evander Holyfield's victory over Carlos De Leon. It was then that his love affair with boxing began.

"I remember how brutal it was. I remember when Mormeck went down the crowd went crazy. I'd never quite heard anything like that. As a physician it's still hard for me but I'm beginning to understand how people can endeavour in a sport that damages the brain. How can they risk this precious organ that can't be replaced? I just have reverence and respect for the sport. I fall in love with all the boxers. I call it the 'vulnerability of violent men' – there's something wonderful about these kids, even the mean sons of bitches.

"Zab Judah was tough, really tough, but he was real with me, a real guy. He talked about his life in the ghetto and what it was like, his father and his wife. Darchinyan is scarily tough. You wouldn't want to walk into this little 5ft 2in, 118lbs kid. They're just sweet kids, smart kids. And some are poor souls, poor lost souls. Even the champs."

In boxing, he has found a subject matter that stimulates him to the maximum, and boxing has gained a conscientious and talented artist. Perhaps it's a testament to the power of boxing that a man for so long dedicated to protecting people's health could fall in love with boxing and now be on a mission to catalogue and document the sport's protagonists.