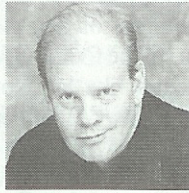
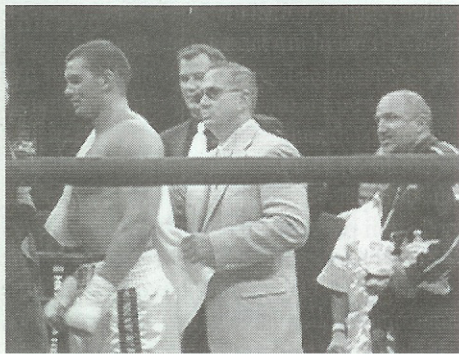


Hooliganism

Mike Houlihan



Had dinner in Gotham with boxing legend Angelo Dundee last month. Yeah, it was pretty cool. Mike "Pickle" Joyce set it up. It was the eve of Tommy Zbikowski's professional boxing debut at Madison Square Garden. Tommy is captain of the fighting Irish football squad and he was fighting on the under card of the Cotto vs. Malagnaggi welterweight championship of the world. Pickle represents Tommy and a few other contenders.



After a gigantic steak and couple of Manhattans I rode back to their hotel with Pick and Ang.

The colossal black limo cruised down Broadway through Times Square and I looked at the ...cont'd

returned to his native Ireland from America. In the play he was born in Tralee. Finally, there is Declan, an angry young man, who lashes into everyone. The origins of his anger are not revealed until the very end and by then the exposition comes too late.

In 2000, *An Irish Play* was awarded The Kennedy Center's Mark Twain Comedy Playwriting Award. That award goes to the best student-written full length comedy play each year. O'Brien was a student at Brown University, Providence, RI, at the time.

Overall, the Festival, which was held at the Young Center for the Performing Arts in Toronto's refurbished Distillery District, was a great success. The Toronto Irish Players organizing committee under the leadership of Alan Hunt and Gina Taylor and fundraising of Peggy Delaney made sure everything ran smoothly. They are indebted to The Ireland Fund of Canada for financial support. The adjudicators were Mary Durkan of Toronto who teaches at Humber College and John P. Kelly of Ottawa. Next year's festival will be held in Milwaukee.

his boyhood and how he originally got into the boxing game. I said, "So Ang, are you any relation to Crocodile Dundee?"

My wisecrack fell flatter than Tyson kissing the canvas at the hands of Buster Douglas.

We smoked a cigar at the hotel and Angelo hit the hay. Pickle had the limo all night so we hopped back in and met up with a colorful crew of Chicago characters who were in town for the fight.

Earlier that night I had called Pickle's cell phone and the guy on the other end said, "Pickle's busy, this is Killer, who's this?"

Killer turned out to be south sider John Kilmartin, Pickle's head of security assigned to keep the girls away from his fighter. Pat Santoro, father and son, were in town for the fight. So were Marty and Oliver McGarry, Danny Joyce, and a murder's row of south side characters. Even Tyson's former ring man Kevin Rooney stumbled through our midst.

On the Peninsula Hotel terrace we quenched our thirst, looked out at the Manhattan skyline and traded boxing stories. I went to the bar for a beer and the bartender said, "That'll be thirteen dollars."

Thirteen bucks for a light beer?
"That's right."

Where's your gun pal, because thirteen bucks for a beer is criminal behavior. I paid up and told the guy, "That's a ten dollar tip in Chicago." and strolled back outside in search of a host. Brad O'Halloran told me he bought a round that cost him a mortgage payment. Only suckers beef.

I took it on the Arthur T. Duffy, weaved to the elevators, and out into the streets. My weekend in Gotham was in full tilt.

The Fitzpatrick Hotel at 56th and Lexington was my headquarters, thanks to the great hospitality of John Fitzpatrick. He sold the inn he owned in Chicago but John has a pair of jewels in Manhattan, where Irish welcomes keep you comfortable in the elegance of Fitz's castles.

My suite was palatial, with a wet bar, canopy bed, and a bathroom the size of Giant's Causeway. Terrific toilet paper too.

I dropped by the Garden Saturday morning and picked up press credentials for my ringside seats, covering the event for the millions of Irish American News readers. Ace photographer and

pugilistic mugs of Dundee and Joyce, descending generations of the sweet science. Angelo talked of

horseplayer Chris Hart came in from New Jersey to represent the IA News as well. There were eleven fights on the card that night, but Tommy Z was our main event. Tommy was the last fight before the actual main event and the Notre Dame hype had built this contest into something bigger than the return of the Gipper.

Somebody was doing a helluva promotion job and Pickle Joyce's fingerprints were all over this brilliant brouhaha. Pickle coaches the Leo high school boxing team as well as managing a number of fighters with Marty McGarry. Joyce is also an attorney and it was his keen Irish logic that convinced the NCAA that Zbikowski should go pro. ND football coach Charlie Weiss said, "It's a great summer job for the kid."

So Tommy Zbikowski, a kid who quarterbacked Buffalo Grove high school, was stepping out on the world's stage. My pal, veteran newspaperman "Stormy", summed it up perfectly when he said, "A great place America. Here's a certified Polack in an predominately Irish-German lily-white suburb who goes to high school with a bunch of Jewish princesses and winds up as a head-banging football jock at Notre Dame. Now the story gets better. He's bordering on stardom at South Bend and hooks up with a South Side boxing guru and the next thing you know he's scheduled for his first professional fight, not in Palookaville but in the Valhalla of boxing greats...New Yawks Madison Square Garden, da Godden no less."

Yeah Stormy, it's a movie. Cue Barbara Stanwyck.

Tommy Z's opponent at the Garden that night seemed like an afterthought. Big black dude who outweighed the ND captain by a dozen pounds. Tommy knocked the bum out in 49 seconds.

We all headed down the street to Foley's bar for the victory party where it looked like the entire Fighting Irish football squad was holding court while waiting for Tommy and Pickle. It was strange seeing the loser's corner man at the party, and he was loaded to the gills to boot. Corner man took a swing at my pal Bubba Lee, whereupon the football team grabbed the mope and threw him into a cab outta town before Tommy's entourage tore him to pieces. I'm standing in front of the bar with Pat Hickey watching all this nonsense when Mark Vanecko walks up with Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong, yeah ol' one ball himself. What a night!

But the man of the hour, the night, and the entire weekend was Mike Pickle Joyce. You should have seen him in the ring at the Garden wearing shades as he draped a towel over the victorious shoulders of Tommy Z. He had orchestrated this entire experience with panache and a cast of characters right out of a Damon Runyon story. I've seen some theatrical extravaganzas in my day, but the weekend in Gotham for the Tommy Z. fight was nonpareil. Thanks Pickle.