

This Holocaust Legacy Packs a Punch

Shot three times by the Nazis in Poland, Bernard Fleischer was down for the count. But just as he was about to be finished off, the German soldier's gun froze.

Assuming he'd die anyway, the soldier left Bernard in a barn. Bernard survived and later joined the Jewish resistance movement. Decades later, his son and grandson are perpetuating his Holocaust legacy in the boxing ring.

This past weekend junior welterweight Dustin "The White Tiger" Fleischer faced Ira Frank at Veteran's Memorial Park in Beach Haven, New Jersey—with his father, Phil Fleischer, as his lead cornerman for the first time. Dustin says it is his grandfather's message that gives him strength.

Specifically, he wants to be the answer to the trivia question, "Who is the first world champion boxer to be the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor?"

"It helps me bring a message, helps give my career more of a meaning. Especially when it comes to my heritage and my religion," Dustin Fleischer, 25, tells .

"I just kind of knew he had his grandfather's strength in him," says Phil Fleischer. "There was something about those two. They just kind of clicked."

In his will, Bernard Fleischer left Dustin his Star of David necklace, which Dustin wears while he walks into the ring every time he fights, in addition to sporting a Star of David on his trunks.

"I actually wanted it, but he gave it to his grandson," Phil quips regarding the necklace.

Dustin—5-foot-9, 140 pounds—recalls getting picked on because his mother dressed him up in bow ties and suspenders. He responded by learning martial arts from age 5 and boxing four years later, following in the footsteps of his father.

He thrived, compiling an amateur boxing record of 112-18 and qualifying for the Olympic Trials for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. He lived in the U.S. Olympic training camp at 15.

“A lot of people thought Dustin could be the one. A lot of people were very high on Dustin about making this (Olympic) team,” Phil recalled.

Dustin, however, came down with mononucleosis and got sidetracked.

“When he came back (from the Olympic camp), he was very depressed, but he learned something from it,” Phil says. “He said, ‘Dad, all my life I pushed for this, but I’ve got to have something else in my life in case I ever get hurt with boxing, so I’m going to finish up my education, and once I finish school I will then turn pro.’”

Indeed, Dustin earned a degree in transportation and worked for his father’s trucking company to help the business during the economic recession. All the while, he kept up his boxing skills and would eventually be signed earlier this year by Roc Nation Sports, part of the consortium of entertainment-related entities owned by the rapper Jay Z.

On Jan. 9, 2015, at Madison Square Garden in New York City, during the inaugural “throne boxing” event hosted by Roc Nation Sports, Dustin made his professional debut—scoring a second-round technical knockout victory over Frank Jordan. Soon after the fight, Roc Nation Sports signed him to an exclusive promotional agreement.

“It feels like everything happens for a reason,” Dustin says of his journey to the pros since falling short of the Olympic

team. "I couldn't ask for anything more—the age I turned pro, the people that I'm with. My career is just moving the way I pictured it would move."

Roc Nation "will only sign a certain level of fighter, and to be at that level is definitely a confidence-booster," he says. Dustin doesn't work directly with Jay Z, but has met him.

"The way he talks is just kind of like I pictured him ... He talks as cool as he raps, really," Dustin says.

Within the world of boxing, Dustin says he seeks to emulate the heart of Timothy Bradley, the smarts of Terence Crawford, and the longevity of Floyd Mayweather.

"There really has never been a fighter who's been able to stay that dominant throughout all the years he's been boxing and really not have a scratch on him," Dustin says of Mayweather. "You've really got to admire that as a boxer."

Dustin has never been to Israel, but says he regularly follows Israel news websites and wishes to partake in a boxing match in the Jewish state one day.

Bernard Fleischer died seven years ago, but the late Holocaust survivor would have most certainly beamed with pride at the father-son team entering the ring last weekend. By the way, he won that bout.

"This is one step in Jewish history, and we'll keep rolling from there," Phil says. {eo}

For more information on boxer Dustin Fleischer, follow him on Facebook, @TheWhiteTigerDustinFleischer, or Instagram and Twitter, @dustinfleischer.

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