

WABASH VALLEY

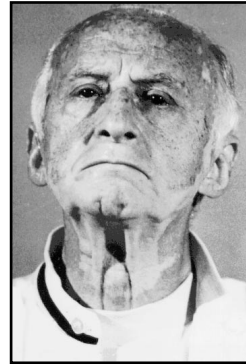
PROFILES

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Ray Arcel

In the rough-and-tumble sport of professional boxing, Terre Haute native Ray Arcel was distinctive.

Articulate and courteous, Arcel carried himself as if an attaché case belonged in his hands. For a while, he wanted to be a physician. Instead, he became one of the most successful trainers in boxing history, producing at least 19 world champions between 1923 and 1982, including Benny Leonard, Frankie Genaro, Abe Goldstein, Charlie Phil Rosenberg, Jackie “Kid” Berg, Lou Brouillard, Teddy Yarosz, Sixto Escobar, James J. Braddock, Tony Marino, Freddie Steele, Ceferino Garcia, Billy Soose, Alfonzo “Peppermint” Frazer, Tony Zale, Ezzard Charles, Kid Gavilan, Roberto Duran and Larry Holmes. Leonard, world lightweight champ from 1917 to 1925, was Ray’s favorite. “He was a master fighter, using brains instead of brawn,” he said. In 1982 Arcel was the first trainer inducted into Ring’s Boxing Hall of Fame. He was enshrined at the new International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, N.Y. in 1990.



The son of David and Rosa Arcel, Ray was born Aug. 30, 1899, at 812 S. Fourth St. His father managed Addie’s Confectionary (named after Ray’s paternal grandmother Adelia) at 113 S. Fourth St., next to Albert Fiess’ harness shop. When Ramel and Adelia Arcel settled in Terre Haute in 1883, the family resided at 102 N. 13th St., operating a fruit concession. Before Ray was a teen, the family moved to East Harlem. His parents enrolled him at Peter Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan. He rode a bike to school every day, excelling at cross country and in the classroom. His interest shifted to boxing after a few weekend amateur bouts.

For several years Ray was a purchasing agent for Meehanite Metal Corp., serving as cornerman in his spare time. Eventually, he owned his own gym in Brooklyn. Current Terry Ray trainer Angelo Dundee, who handled Muhammed Ali, was among his many notable pupils. Arcel acquired a reputation as a disciplinarian. Yet he was a genius for concocting a battle plan. Retired fighters recognized him for teaching moral values, too. Twice he came out of retirement. In 1970, at age 71, he began training Roberto Duran and steered the fighter to a world title within two years. On June 11, 1982, he worked his last championship bout in Larry Holmes’ corner, assisting former student Eddie Futch in the successful title defense against heavyweight challenger Gerry Cooney. Not all of the 2,000 fighters Arcel trained during his career — which spanned nearly 70 years — won. Heavyweight champion Joe Louis beat 14 of them. “Louis thought I was ‘The Meat Wagon,’” Arcel once told an amused audience.

On March 7, 1994, Arcel died at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York. He was 94. He was survived by his second wife Stephanie, son-in-law Clement Bloch and two granddaughters. Honors continue to come his way. On March 28, 1999, Arcel was posthumously inducted into the New York Jewish Sports Hall of Fame. Sarah and Ramel Arcel, an aunt and uncle, are buried at Highland Lawn Cemetery.

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