



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article contains excerpts from a story written by Nin Privitera that appeared in the Observer Today (Dunkirk, NY), March 12, 2017, the Buffalo Veteran's Boxers Association Ring #44 website, and the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame website.

Dunkirk's Muscato Family had Boxing in their Blood

Angelo Muscato was a steel worker and a barber. Angelo and his wife had five children – Joe, Phil, Sammy, Vinnie and the sole daughter and youngest child, Anita. The birth of Anita led to difficulties that forced her mother to be institutionalized for the little mental care that was available in the early 1900s.

After a very difficult family time, Angelo decided to put his children into St. Mary's Orphanage and Asylum on old Bennett Road, now Route 60. It sat on the site which is currently Jamestown Community College North County Center building. That building still has a cross at the top from its previous use as St. Joseph's School for Exceptional Children.

The plan to put the Muscato children in the orphanage was altered somewhat when a new eventuality emerged for Vinnie and the baby, Anita. Dan Lutz of Dan's Moving and Storage, proposed to adopt Vinnie, later renamed Paul Lutz, and Anita.

Angelo agreed and the two youngsters became part of the Lutz family.

Some time passed, Angelo remarried, and he decided to take the three boys and begin a new life in Buffalo. At that time, the Queen City was a national hot bed of boxing. Fast money was available for young men willing to brave the ring.

The Muscato boys would take on that opportunity with notable success.

Joe, who was born in 1919, had 55 amateur fights from 1938 to 1941 earning the Western New York and New Jersey heavyweight titles. He took to the ring as a professional heavyweight boxer on September 22, 1941, when he knocked out Jim Boyle in the first round. In 1942 he had 16 fights from Chicago to Newark compiling a 12-4 record. Compare that formidable schedule with that of today's top fighters who might have at most two bouts a year.



Joe Muscato (left) joined the Army in 1942. He originally fought other service boxers and trained other Army boxers at Ft. Hood and Ft. Dix. In March 1945, while stationed on Iwo Jima, he got hit with shrapnel in both legs from an attack by Japanese bombers. Despite the wounds, he resumed his boxing career in 1946 and continued until 1949. Known as “Sergeant,” he became the seventh ranked heavyweight in the world at the peak of his career.

After Joe finished his 43-bout pro career, he made his debut in the popular professional wrestling circuit in 1950. He campaigned as a pro grappler for seven years.

He remained in the sports of boxing and wrestling for many years as a noted and popular referee, judge and timekeeper officiating matches throughout Western New York.

Joe was a frequent referee for pro-wrestling events at Floral Hall at the Chautauqua County Fairgrounds. Many noted wrestling personalities came to Dunkirk to entertain raucous crowds. One night in 1950, more than 2,000 fans gathered to see Sunny War Cloud, Steve “Mr. America” Stanlee, Farmer Doc Marlin, Johnny Barend, and Kay Bell. Bad guy Bell stirred such ire during his bout, that on his way back to the dressing room, escorted by police officer Clem Lutz, a young boy attacked Bell with a knife which

nearly started a riot. A few nights later, the great Gorgeous George appeared at Floral Hall and beat Notre Dame great Jumping Joe Savoldi with a leg lock in the main event.

Joe Muscato died of a heart attack on December 8, 1977 in the Buffalo VA Hospital while awaiting open heart surgery.



The second Muscato brother, **Phil Muscato** (right) was born in 1923

and became Buffalo's greatest heavyweight fighter. He became the second-ranked heavyweight in the world behind Billy Conn at the peak of his career in the mid 1940s.

Phil had 32 main event bouts in Buffalo drawing as many as 11,541 fans to see him fight Joltin' Joe Matisi in 1948. This was a grudge match because Matisi had hurt Phil's older brother, Joe, in 1946. Many observers of the fight believe Phil could have knocked out Matisi but decided to punish him for ten rounds.

Lee Oma was Phil's opponent on March 8, 1949. Oma had friends in Dunkirk where he attended a small gathering at the Third Street Columbus Club that day sharing a few drinks. He was driven by car into Buffalo by his Dunkirk friends and later that night defeated Phil Muscato in a 10-round decision.

As Phil's 79-bout career was coming to a close, he took some fights that had a big payday but were probably not physically advisable. He lost his last seven fights, including two knockouts to Archie Moore and the great Rocky Marciano. He ended his career in 1950

after losing to a much bigger 230-pound Harry Matthews. Phil died in July 7, 1991, at the age of 68, from Lou Gehrig's Disease.

The youngest brother, Sammy Muscato, was a middleweight boxer. His 37-bout career ended in 1953.

The Muscato brothers contributed to the boxing in other ways – through teaching and influencing young boxing talent. The children of Joe Muscato furthered the tradition by hosting amateur bouts and establishing a traveling boxing museum. Their endeavors so impressed former Buffalo mayor Jimmy Griffin that he dedicated a room in City Hall for the Buffalo Boxing Hall of Fame and memorabilia.



Joe and Phil Muscato (left) were inducted into the Buffalo Boxing Hall of Fame in 1998, the same year as former Jamestown boxer Jimmy Clark.

Joe Muscato's boxing record: <https://boxrec.com/en/proboxer/26940>

Phil Muscato's boxing record: <https://boxrec.com/en/proboxer/12210>

Sammy Muscato's boxing record: <https://boxrec.com/en/proboxer/153871>

The entire **Muscato family** was inducted into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame in 2007. <https://www.buffalosportshallfame.com/member/the-muscato-family/>