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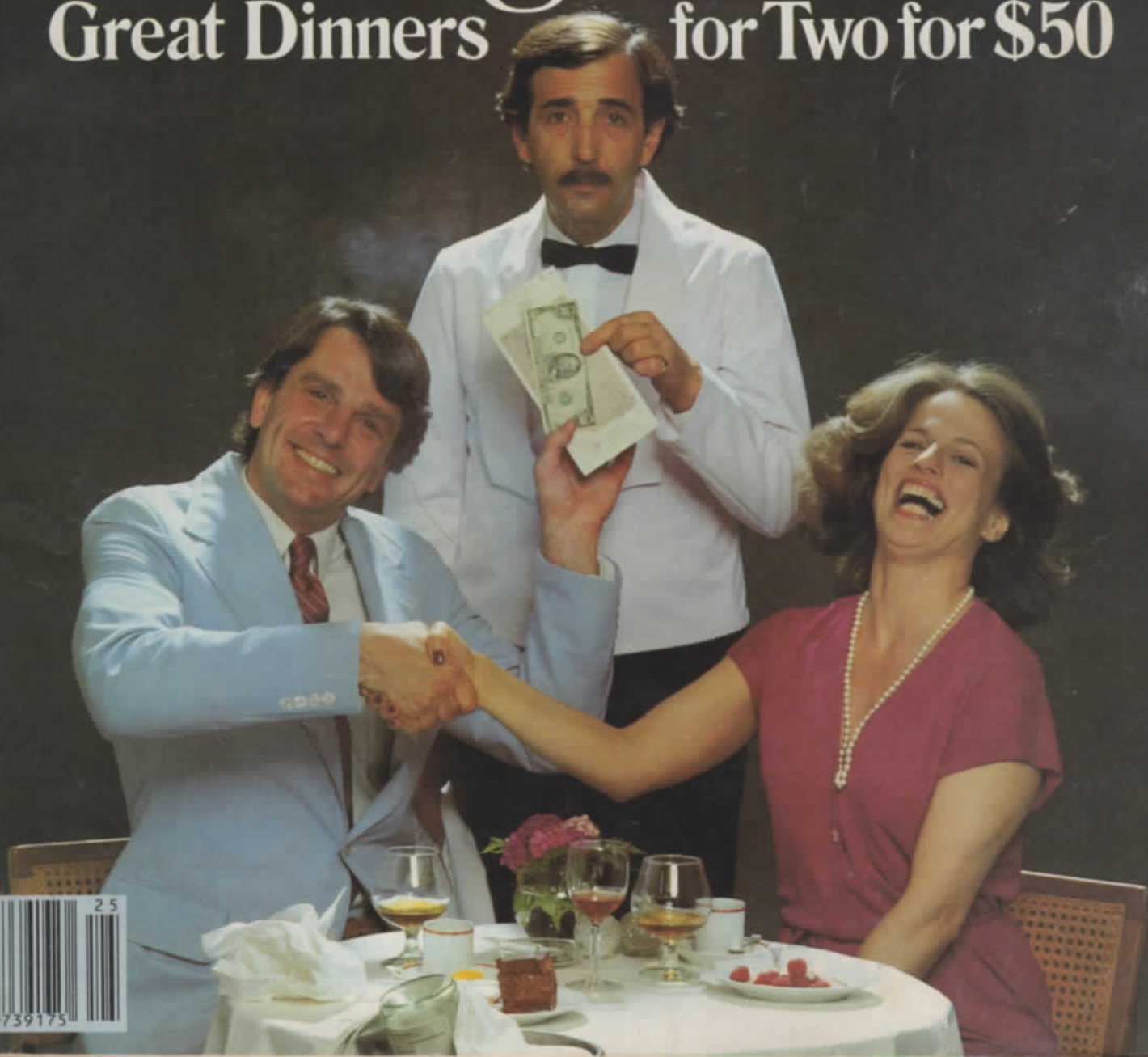
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The Great Pyramid Scam Hits Town
Hamill on Duran, Ziegel on Sugar Ray

NEW YORK

Eating Smart

Great Dinners for Two for \$50



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The Greatest Street Fighter

By Pete Hamill

“... ‘Roberto Duran’s got them eyes. Like an animal. Like he wants to kill you. It doesn’t matter who fights him, they gotta fear him’...”

THEY CAME EARLY TO GLEASON’S Gym, on 30th Street, for the first workout. Some of them wore business suits, carried briefcases and the *New York Times*, stood uneasily against the peeling tan walls eating hamburgers. Others had tucked *El Diario* under the arms of zipper jackets, drank canned soda, murmured in Spanish. They watched preliminary kids work in the two large rings while a seasoned middleweight hammered a speed bag at the far end of the gym. Some of them hadn’t been near a fighters’ gym in years, others wore the knobbed and serrated faces of the fight racket, and they were all waiting for Roberto Duran.

“They say he use to swim wit’ the sharks down in that canal, where he live,” said a tall, middle-aged black man in a red sweater. “He use to look right at them M.F.’s and not even blink. You hear me?”

“Oh, I hear you,” another man said, and then smiled. “The thing is, did Leonard hear you?”

In Gleason’s, they talked the shorthand of boxing. They all knew that Sugar Ray Leonard was the World Boxing Council welterweight champion of the world; a slick young man with a line of deferential con out of some lost seam of the Eisenhower years; a great amateur fighter, winner of 145 of his 150 unpaid contests; Olympic gold-medal winner in Montreal in 1976; a sudden star of television, his opponents booked brilliantly by Angelo Dundee to show the young man at his best while learning his brutal trade. They had seen Leonard beat Wilfredo Benitez for the WBC championship, in a fight that betrayed the young man’s inexperience and uncertainty, but also

displayed his potential greatness. And now, on this day in April, they also knew that he had signed to fight Roberto Duran, the man some called “Cholo” and others “Manos de Piedra,” or “Hands of Stone.”

“Now we find out,” said Jack Barrett, who has been around the racket for 40 years as a manager and matchmaker. “Now we see what Leonard’s made of. Everybody wants to know if the kid has it. And they’re gonna pay millions to find out.”

This week, they will pay those millions, when Roberto Duran and Sugar Ray Leonard climb into the ring of the 77,000-seat Olympic Stadium in Montreal. When all the money is counted from the more than 300 closed-circuit locations in the United States and Canada and home TV in 40 other countries, the promoters expect that \$30 million will be in the till. Leonard’s end alone may come to more than \$6 million. Duran has been guaranteed \$1.5 million.

And on this day in April, the sense of the impending drama permeated the stale air of the gym. Suddenly Duran appeared, walking quickly out of the lockers in the back, scarlet trunks pulled over a kelly-green sweatsuit. The preliminary boys stepped out of one of the rings, holding the rope strands wide to admit the great fighter. Duran threw a combination of punches at the air and smiled as the gym broke into applause.

This was Duran’s benign smile, and when he looked up at the balcony and saw a fat guy sleeping with his cheek on the rail, he laughed out loud and pointed. But Duran has another smile. I first saw it on the evening of September 13, 1971, at Madison Square Garden. A young fighter named Benny Huertas was in the semifinal. He had

been a Spanish Golden Gloves champion in the mid-sixties, a good defensive boxer with a fair punch; as a pro, he had been a winner more often than a loser. He was fighting an undefeated twenty-year-old from Panama.

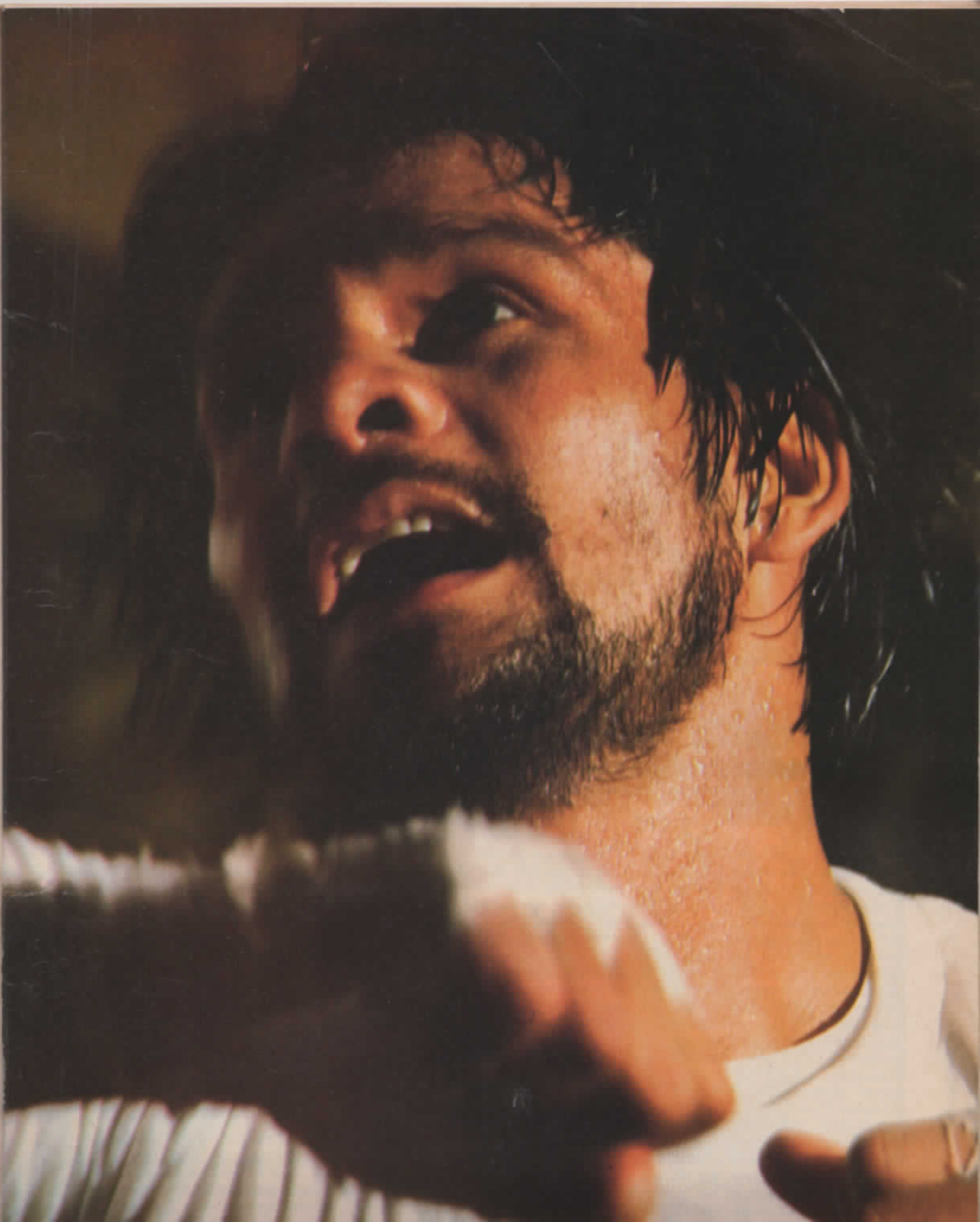
The kid from Panama was, of course, Roberto Duran. He came into the ring that night in a ratty bathrobe, wearing worn boxing shoes, with three days’ growth of beard. The bell rang, Duran walked over and hit Benny with a brutal right hand. And then he smiled. He hit Benny with another right hand, then a brace of hooks, another right hand, and Benny was gone. Duran turned around for his bathrobe and started out of the ring, a swift, silent visitor who had dispatched poor Benny Huertas with the murderous efficiency of a hit man, and as much compassion.

“Who the hell was that?” I asked Teddy Brenner, who was then the matchmaker for the Garden.

“Roberto Duran,” he said. “Remember his name. He doesn’t even know how to fight yet, and he kills you.”

Eight years have passed since Duran won the lightweight championship from Ken Buchanan. He now knows how to fight. He learned as champion of the world, defending his title eleven times, knocking out every challenger except Edwin Viruet, who wisely chose to run for fifteen rounds. According to *The Ring Record Book*, Duran has won 70 of his 71 professional fights, 55 by knockouts, including 2 vicious knockouts of Esteban DeJesus, the only man ever to beat him.

Along the way, Duran has beaten tall, rangy fighters and short, strong boys; he’s overwhelmed southpaws, and boxers, and learned how to avoid getting hit. In Gleason’s he shadow-boxed for two rounds, made the quick



To Roberto Duran from all the fans of the book "Hoy"

“...Along the way, Duran has beaten both tall, rangy fighters and short, strong boys, and now he’s learned how to avoid getting hit...”

moves of escape in corners, repeating the patterns of the trade, breaking a sweat, his hair bouncing in a spiky shag, the mustache framing the small mouth. His face was tan and smooth, the only scar over his right cheekbone. He bent to the floor, stretched his legs, the powerful upper torso thicker than it had been when he was a kid, but the moves fresh and youthful. A

that Duran was responding to the challenge, summoning what was necessary to win, and not much more; against a good fighter like Palomino, Duran looked great. Against mediocrities, he trained little, and looked ordinary.

In Gleason’s that first day, he didn’t box. The fight was still two months away, and after the first few days of publicity, he would go away to Gros-

singer’s and then skipped rope, doing baroque, Zorro-like whiplash moves with the rope, and then he was finished. He went into the shower, came out wearing cheap rubber shower clogs and a yellow towel, and reached for a comb. When he finished dressing, he went out into the chill spring air of 30th Street, smiled crookedly and benignly at the fans, said a few things in rapid Spanish (“Get there early, kid”), and, followed by his entourage, climbed into a brown van and vanished into the city.

Nobody said a word to him about the diamond earring.

SIX WEEKS LATER, ROBERTO Duran could be found at Gros-singer’s, running in the empty mornings with four of his sparring partners, working out each day at two. Most fighters hate training, the manual labor of boxing. They come from the bad sides of tough towns; they ply their trade before multitudes, usually at night, but they prepare like monks. Denial is at the heart of the routine: denial of laughter, music, sex, companionship, a denial to produce an explosion of energy and release and destructiveness. The routine seemed to work well on Roberto Duran.

“He’ll be ready,” said Freddie Brown, who was training him for this fight, as he had for all the big ones since Buchanan. “He’s starting to get mean.”

Freddie Brown is 74 and has been in the fight racket for 55 years, during which time he has handled twelve world champions, including Rocky Marciano. He has a wonderful face, with a flat, fist-formed nose and a slow smile, his mouth usually clamped on a cigar. He has seen too many *Wunderkinder* come and go to be generous with praise, but he loves Roberto Duran.

“He might be the greatest lightweight we ever had,” he said one morning, waiting for Duran to arrive for his 10 A.M. breakfast of steak and vegetables. “The only thing we had like him is Henry Armstrong. He became a great fighter after the Buchanan fight. I mean he is a smart fighter. People think he’s just a brawler, but he don’t get hit much, like Marciano. You see him against Palomino? Well, he beat Palomino wit’ the jab. He *outjabs* the guy. Ray Arcel brought me the guy, because the manager wanted Ray to train him. The manager is Carlos Eleta, a rich guy from Panama. But Ray got a job, he don’t have all the time in the world, so

diamond earring glittered in his right lobe.

“If he’s in shape, he’ll give Leonard some terrible time,” Jack Barrett said. And Duran’s shape was the key to the drama. He had given up his lightweight championship more than a year before, because making the 135-pound weight limit was agony. Between fights, Duran liked to eat; it’s a habit peculiar to those who have grown up poor. At times his weight had ballooned to 170 pounds, and his trainers were forced to become policemen. So he became a welterweight, fighting masterfully at the 147-pound limit against Monroe Brooks and former champion Carlos Palomino, but looking sluggish and indifferent against mediocre opponents. He had beaten all eight welterweights he had faced, and knocked out four of them, but the talk in the trade was that at 147 pounds Duran had lost his punch, that the bigger fighters absorbed shock better than lightweights did. It was more likely

singer’s, not far from the Concord, where he had trained for Buchanan. The pressure would come later; this was a day for fun. So he taped his hands with clean white bandages, and stepped out of the ring, and went over to the heavy bags, trailed by five photographers and more than 200 fans.

He let the bag swing, then bent under it, made the same move twice more, then jabbed, tapping at the leather surface, then unleashed a swift combination, making an eerie, high-pitched, bird-like sound as he punched. “Hoy! Hoy-hoy-hoy! Hump-HOY!” He turned and grinned for the photographers, the benign grin, then jabbed, saying, “Bing! Bing-bing!” Then two hooks: “Hoy-hoy!” Then a hook right hand: “WHUP! Hoy!” The sounds had silenced the gym, leather smacking leather, combined with Duran’s high-pitched bird sounds. And everybody there was thinking, What will he do to Leonard? What will Leonard do to him? He worked a few rounds on the heavy



At ease: Duran plays dominoes with Anibal Lastra and Ruben Blades.

“...The promoters expect to see at least \$30 million in the till. Sugar Ray Leonard’s end alone might come to more than \$6 million...”

we work together with the guy, Ray comin’ when he has the time. You have a problem wit’ the guy, because at the start he didn’t have any English, so you have to demonstrate. But he learns, he understands. You show him this, you show him that. I taught him how to be a body puncher, now he’s one of the best body punchers in the business. I’d say to him, ‘You pick head up too high, you no have it down. Down, down,’ I’d say to the guy. And he would curse at me, and twenty minutes later he comes over and apologizes. But he’s very tricky, and smart, and that’s what you want. You want to fool the guy in front of you.”

Brown’s toughest struggles have been with Duran’s eating habits.

“He used to come in 160, 162, and you’d have to take off 25 pounds to make the lightweight limit,” he said. “So I used to starve him. He’d say to me, ‘You no give me what to eat; I no strong, I no strong.’ And I’d starve him anyway. But he’d have guys sneak in with two, three steaks, and he’d eat them, and I’d go crazy. The best place was down in Panama. A place called Cimarron. An army camp where the sojers train that want to be sojers in Panama. We slept in the barracks, and there wasn’t anything to do. Even here,” and he waved at the empty dining room, “there’s too much activity. There you go to bed at six or seven, and you eat what the sojers eat. The toughest thing is gettin’ him in condition. Without condition, he ain’t worth nothin’.”

How will he fight Leonard?

“Duran would love it if Leonard fights him,” he said carefully. “If he fights Duran, he gotta get nailed. And if he runs, he can’t win. The other guy’s got 27 fights, and Duran’s got what, 71? At the first press conference, Leonard said he was gonna kill him, and Duran wanted to fight him right there, and I look at the kid and see the fear’s in him. And that’s gotta be natural. Even Palomino was ascaered of him. He’s got them eyes. Like an animal. Like he wants to kill you. No matter who fights him, they gotta fear him.”

AT TWO IN THE AFTERNOON, a small crowd waited outside the Grossinger Ski Lodge, their cars parked in the dusty, unfinished lot. One of those waiting was Ruben Blades, a 32-year-old singer who is now one of the major stars of Latin music. A lawyer, a superb writer, he is also

a Panamanian and has known Roberto Duran for fifteen years.

“I was singing *coro* for a group called *Bush y Los Magnificos*,” he said, laughing at the name of the group. “I was only seventeen and very shy, and even now the name of the group makes me laugh. We were playing a dance at the Club Caledonia, or the Club Atlas, I’m not sure, in Panama City, and Roberto showed up. He was just starting to box then, and he was hot. And a mutual friend named Claudio introduced us. He loved music, and I liked him.”

The friendship flourished. After Duran turned pro and started to knock people out, Blades began establishing his own reputation in Panama. Now he had been at the camp for four days, running with Duran in the morning, playing endless games of dominoes at night.

“You have to understand Panama,” Blades said. “Everybody knows everybody. And everybody talks. Somebody used to go out with your sister, or knew your uncle, or went with your aunt before she got married. And at the beginning, people said Roberto wouldn’t make it, he wouldn’t have the will to go ahead, or he was too small, or whatever. But he proved them wrong. And, yes, some people thought he was nuts. But I know this: I never saw anybody—anybody—so genuine as Roberto. He has not changed. He is famous all over the world, he has plenty of money. But his character hasn’t changed. He’s a friend’s friend. Well, one thing maybe changed: He’s wiser.”

When the ski lodge was opened, Blades and I walked in and waited against the wall as the fighters changed clothes in the dressing rooms.

“You have to understand one thing: This guy came from the streets,” Blades said. “I know that sounds like a cliché, but it’s the truth about Roberto. He came from Chorrillo. I hate to use the word ‘slum,’ but let’s say it was poor. Very poor. A barrio in Panama City over near the border of the Canal Zone. And if it’s a cliché, then Roberto made the clichés work.”

From all reports, Chorrillo is the kind of place that creates athletes and murderers: three-story wooden tenements, a lot of bars, too much poverty. Roberto Carlos Duran was one of nine children of Clara and Osvaldo Duran; his father, a Mexican national, took off when Roberto was small, and Duran never met him again until after

he was champion of the world. When the boy was four, his mother moved the fatherless family to Guararé, 150 miles from Panama City (he still returns for the town’s annual feria). But a few years later they were back in Chorrillo. Almost ten times, Duran has said, his mother was forced actually to give him away: to relatives, friends, anyone who could feed him. And soon he was living in the streets, on his own, shining shoes, school behind him at fourteen, roaming the city on an aimless, hungry reconnaissance. You sense, talking to Duran, that he saw, and did, some terrible things in those years; no human being wearing boxing gloves could ever produce the kind of fear that must have been part of those years.

“I roamed all over,” he told me one morning at Grossinger’s. “The city was the world. I knew there was some other places, some countries out there, but I didn’t know where. It was just the city. Panama, Chorrillo. There were no frontiers. Just that place.”

There was still a lot of Chorrillo in Duran as he worked with sparring partners Teddy White, who looks exactly like Ray Leonard, and Kevin Rooney, a tough, young welterweight out of Staten Island, undefeated in seven pro fights. He went at them with feral, remorseless energy, punishing them when he could, his eyes blazing under the leather mask of the headgear. And I tried to picture him on those streets in Chorrillo fighting for turf as a shoeshine kid, protecting his corners, stealing when there wasn’t enough money, leading a gang on midnight raids over the fence of the Canal Zone. The zone was an enraging fact of life for the kids of Chorrillo: neat lawns, white colonial architecture, its garbage cans full of half-eaten food, and lots of tall, blond, sunburned American soldiers who sometimes walked through the gates and into Chorrillo looking for whores. Sometimes they found them. And sometimes they found a wild-eyed, 80-pound kid with a sneer on his face, waiting in an alley, leaping at them with the fury of hatred and hunger, leaving them in quivering piles in the mud of Panama.

“Yeah, liked hitting big guys,” he said.

“Americans?”

He smiled and reached for some bread. Asked once what he thought of Muhammad Ali, he said, “Good boxer, good champion.” Asked how he thought he would do against Ali in a

street fight, he laughed. "I beat the shit out of him."

Boxing saved him. A man named Sammy Medina saw him fighting on the street. Duran says his toughest fight was a 90-minute war on those streets. Medina took him to a gym and started to teach him. Another man, Nestor Quinones, came in later as his trainer (and remains with him today). Duran had only 16 fights as an amateur and won 13 of them (Leonard won 145 of his 150 amateur fights), but he had found a purpose to his life, a way to live. He was a fighter. After he turned pro, Carlos Eleta saw him, remembered him as a kid he'd once caught stealing coconuts from his estate, and bought the young fighter's contract for \$300. Eleta owns horses, Air Panama, several radio and TV stations; Duran

might have used himself up in club fights or thrown his money across the bars of Panama City, but Eleta gave him the guidance he had never had. It is no accident that Duran calls him Papa. With the money Eleta helped him earn, Duran bought a house for the mother who had given him away so many times; another large house for himself, his wife, Felicidad, and their four children; and several apartment houses and other investments that will keep Duran off the streets for the rest of his life.

"In Panama you see him different than here," Ruben Blades said. "He has a very close relationship with his family. And he doesn't play big shot with them. When they talk, he listens."

In a press conference after one of the workouts at Grossinger's, Blades

served as an interpreter. One of the reporters asked Duran if he believed Leonard's statement that he hadn't really been in shape for the championship fight with Benitez, in which he didn't exactly look like a great champion.

"*Puro cuento*," Duran said, his lip curling.

Blades translated the phrase as "Baloney." But later, outside, he explained: "In Panama, '*puro cuento*' is more complicated. It can mean, all at the same time, 'bullshit,' 'f--- you,' 'who the hell cares,' and 'get lost.' So for people who read newspapers, 'baloney.'" Blades laughed. "Roberto knows all the real meanings."

After another workout in which Duran was tough and brutal to his sparring partners, Blades shook his head.

Sugar Ray Leonard: How Sweet He Is

By Vic Ziegel

AND IN THIS CORNER, DRINKING his 7-Up, smiling his winning smile, his youthful face unmarked by Freud and foe, his bride of six months and their six-year-old son at his side—you can't see him because of the millions of dollars piling up all around him, but he's there, and he's the welterweight champion of the world—ladies and gentlemen, a dedicated and generous human being (don't let the short pants fool you), Sugar Ray Leonard.

Who could argue with that introduction? If Getha Leonard had not named the fifth of her seven children for singer Ray Charles, if it weren't almost mandatory that boxing Rays be nicknamed Sugar (in deference to Sugar Ray Robinson), this admirable 24-year-old would now be known as *Saint* Ray Leonard.

Why, if there weren't this lucrative piece of business against Roberto Duran on Friday night, Sugar Ray might be back home in Maryland getting on with his real work: Citizens Concerned for a Cleaner Prince Georges County. He's on the committee. He's on the board of directors of the Kidney Foundation. He's honorary chairperson for the membership drive of the Mental Health Association of Prince Georges County. On TV he endorses the Maryland Childhood Immunization Program.

Don't forget his public appearances, his public-relations man says. Okay, his appearances. Sugar Ray, a nineteen-page, nine-by-fourteen fact sheet tells us, "speaks regularly at dozens of schools, libraries, churches,



Sugar Ray Saint: A good man fighting for Mom, Dad, and the almighty dollar.

and civic groups on topics ranging from 'The Importance of Staying in School' to 'Brotherhood' and 'Good Sportsmanship.'" What does he tell the library audiences? The publicity man doesn't say. Probably "Don't be overdue."

Why is this American hero beating up people? What is a concerned citizen doing in the fight racket? The violins, Mushky.

Sugar Ray wasn't interested in professional fighting. The Olympic gold medal he won in 1976 was supposed to end his boxing career. He had a scholarship to the University of Mary-

land. Going back into the neighborhoods, working with kids—that was the plan. And then his mother had a heart attack. His father, night manager in a Washington supermarket, was struck by spinal meningitis. There were two teenage sisters still at home. He was twenty years old with a son, Ray Jr., to support. And a girl friend, Juanita, who would someday become his wife. On the same day Sugar Ray and the other Olympic champions were visiting President Ford in the White House, Juanita was applying for welfare assistance for herself and Ray Jr.

"I feel sorry for Leonard," he said. "He's not fighting a guy named Roberto Duran. He's fighting an emotion."

DURAN FINISHED BREAKFAST quickly one morning and sat at a table with Blades, Freddie Brown, and a reporter. He is quick and intelligent in Spanish but feels uncomfortable with English. He seemed tense.

"I fight for the *plata*, the money," he said. "Who's going to fight for pride alone? But this is different. I want the title. Not just the money. The title. I'm a champion. I already have money."

What did he like most about boxing?

"Winning."

"He wasn't going to box after the Olympics," says Juanita Leonard, "but when his folks got sick, when he had the financial problems, money was the only thing that could solve that. He told me, 'I'll box a little while, make a little bit money, maybe quit in a couple of years.' But since then it's just been getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and there's just no quitting."

His first 25 bouts grossed close to \$2 million, and the knockout victory that brought him the title last December was worth \$1.5 million. That's a whopping \$500,000 more than the champion, Wilfredo Benitez, received. It's always the titleholder who earns the greater share, but not when a challenger like Sugar Ray comes along. The prime-time fight on ABC drew the largest rating ever for a non-Ali boxing show. In the complicated financial arrangements for this week's match, Leonard may come away with as much as \$6 million.

Some of that will go for the new home in his favorite county: swimming pool, tennis courts, basket over the garage, an \$850,000 investment, according to one source. But success hasn't changed him a bit, his wife says. A dream to handle, the P.R. man adds. Doesn't talk back to his trainers and won't stop his lawyer from finding million-dollar fights.

There's only one flaw in the face of all this sweetness: the old joke about the woman who said she received a letter from a perfect stranger. Don't be silly, her friend replied. Nobody's perfect.

Before Leonard's entourage moved to Montreal last week, he was training in New Carrollton, Maryland. "For the first time," said a local fight

guy who was watching Leonard before the Olympics, "I'm seeing a little change in the people around him. Those bodyguards, he never had that before. He said he would never go the Ali route."

Leonard was finishing a round of sit-ups, sweat pouring from him. One "bodyguard" was toweling his forehead while another was brushing a towel across his chest. Only Ali, for all his hangers-on, dries Ali.

Another giant-size nit was Leonard's performance at the New York press conference to announce the fight with Duran. He was uncharacteristically sour. Disappointing too. When it was his turn at the microphone, he ranted that he would "kill Duran."

Leonard explained his approach when I spoke to him after the workout. "I was talking Duran's language," the champion insisted. "Duran doesn't understand words like 'I'm going to beat you' or 'I will knock you out' or 'I will defeat you.' All he understands is 'I will kill you. . . . I will destroy you. . . . I will demolish you.' And before he had time to tell me he was going to kill me, I kind of beat him to the punch."

Which is the same phrase he uses when he talks about this toughest of all his opponents. "I'll beat Duran at his own game," Leonard insists. "They all think I'm going to run. I'm not. I'll beat him to the punch. I'm not changing my style at all. What's going to beat Roberto Duran is Sugar Ray Leonard." A knockout, he says, sometime before the tenth round. Earlier, suggests his trainer, Dave Jacobs. Duran's roll-in style, according to the trainer, is perfect for his 147-pounder.

Was he afraid of anything in the world? He smiled and raised his eyebrows. "My wife."

Freddie Brown laughed. "That's the truth."
"And sharks," Duran said, his brow wrinkling. "And yeah, spiders. And, uh, snakes."
No other human beings?
"Nah," he said, waving his hand.
Where did he think he would be ten years from now?
"I don't know," Duran said. "You can't run against fate."

"That's Leonard's way," he said, "not mine."

In two days they were going to break camp and head for Montreal. All the work, all the sparring, running, all the denial would be reduced to fifteen rounds or less of controlled violence in a great stadium, and then it would be over. Duran was asked what he would do after the fight. He said he would go to Miami for a few days with his wife and then return to Panama, relax, and play a little baseball.

"He really loves baseball," Freddie Brown said.

"What position do you play?" he was asked.

Roberto Duran laughed and looked at his hands and back at the reporter. "Any one I want," he said. "Any one I want." ■

Leonard learned his trade in 150 amateur bouts, scoring 75 knockouts, losing five times. He was never knocked out and was off his feet only twice. As a pro, even better: undefeated in his 27 fights, a knockout winner in all but 9.

Early on, when he was fighting the kind of uncomplicated opponents the boxing trade calls "tomato cans," he would imitate the quickstep Ali shuffle and play with the roundhouse bolo punch Ali sometimes used. When his first two pro bouts went to decisions, people asked if this Sugar Ray was more prankster than banger. And then he came on: eight knockouts in nine fights.

A rap that won't go away is that Sugar Ray hasn't fought the very best. The three boxers he knocked out before his title chance were all on the downside of their careers. Against the champion, Benitez, Leonard admitted being "tense," somewhat unsure of himself. He was throwing far too many right-hand bombs, forgetting to punch in the combinations that work so well for him. His hand speed is formidable and is, perhaps, his greatest weapon. When he K.O.ed Britain's Dave Green last March, in his one title defense, with a single crunching left hook, Green was out for almost ten minutes.

Leonard has decided that his skills will overcome Duran's dangerous hands. "He's a good fighter, no doubt about it, but Duran's never fought a guy of my caliber. I respect him being recognized as, pound for pound, the greatest fighter in the world. I mean, hey, fine and dandy. But he'll be beaten to the punch. Beaten at his own game. Those are the facts." ■