

Evening

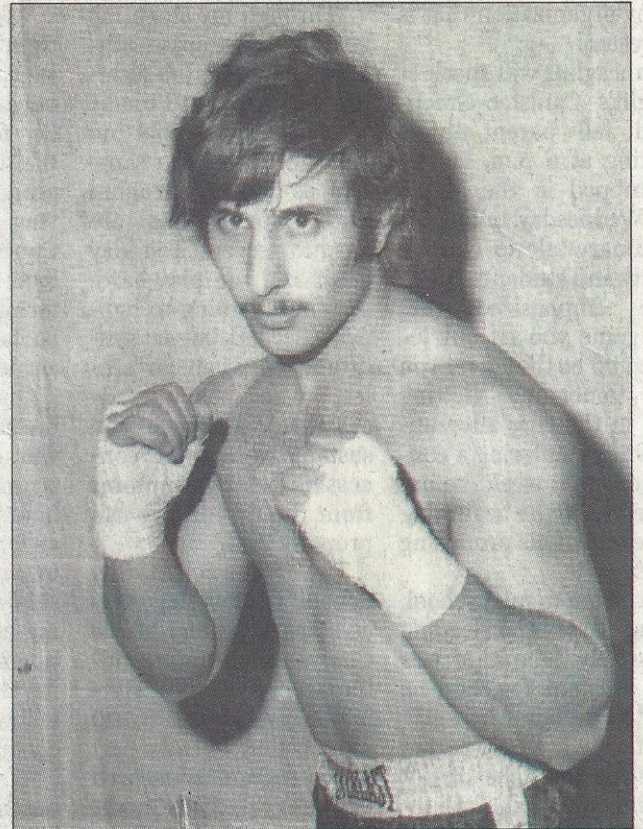
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ANALYSIS

**'In the
clearing
stands a
boxer...'**



His boxing career shortened by the effects of concussions, Ray Ciancaglini has become a leading advocate of concussion awareness. He will speak at Canisteo-Greenwood tonight. THESECONDIMPACT.COM PHOTO

Though it happened long ago, Ray Ciancaglini still "carries the reminders of every glove..."

By Chris Potter
The Evening Tribune

HORNELL — Ray Ciancaglini appeared to have everything going in his favor entering a fight at Syracuse's War Memorial in 1969.

An honors student in the classroom, he had built a reputation as one of the region's best up-and-coming middle-weight boxers before even turning 20, and he was coming off a victory in Buffalo just the week before.

But something wasn't right.

He had caught a right hook to the back of his head in the third round of that match in Buffalo. Though it didn't knock him down, the blow left him temporarily dazed, his vision blurry. The volume level of the crowd seemed to fluctuate wildly, as if someone was cranking the dial of a stereo back and forth.



Former middleweight boxer Ray Ciancaglini, right, presents Hornell Superintendent Doug Wyant with a pair of signed boxing gloves in appreciation of Hornell's efforts to fight concussions. CHRIS POTTER/EVENING TRIBUNE PHOTO

Still, he toughed it out, eventually winning by unanimous decision. He woke up the next day with a headache and fatigue, but he attributed the discomfort to the hard-fought bout. He had committed to the

fight in Syracuse, and he didn't want to back out for something as trivial as a headache.

The symptoms lingered right up to fight night.

Ciancaglini felt slow, and it didn't take long for

his opponent to take advantage. Ciancaglini suffered another massive blow in the first round. He again battled through the rest of the match with a muddled mind. In a daze, he didn't realize the outcome of the fight until an interview with a reporter shortly after the final round.

Ciancaglini has dedicated his life to making sure that second big blow never comes for the youth of New York state.

His story was instrumental in raising concussion awareness, particularly the dangers of second-impact syndrome.

The state implemented the Concussion Management Awareness Act July 1, legislation that was largely inspired by Ciancaglini. He also founded an educational website, thesecondimpact.com, and gives speeches

RAY

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to any organization that is interested.

Ciancaglini will speak at tonight's Canisteo-Greenwood fall parent/athlete meeting at 6 p.m. He also stopped in the Maple City Wednesday, telling his cautionary tale to Hornell faculty and students.

He emphasized that "the game you sit out today could be the career you save tomorrow." Getting back in the ring after unknowingly suffering a concussion the week before proved to be the beginning of the end of his promising career.

He began to miss school, failing classes and sleeping excessively. His mind was in a constant fog, and he couldn't explain why.

"I threw a whole career away for the sake of not missing one fight," Ciancaglini said. "What a foolish mistake. I challenged a concussion, and I got beat. It cost me my quality of life, and my future potential. With the education that we have today about concussions, permanent brain damage and its life-altering conditions are so avoidable. So avoidable."

Conventional wisdom at the time suggested concussions came along with getting knocked unconscious. Ciancaglini was never knocked down, let alone knocked out, so the thought of a concussion wasn't really considered. And the daily headaches? Just part of the sport, the old timers told him.

The symptoms didn't end when he quit boxing in 1972. Ciancaglini now lives with dementia pugilistica, suffering from constant headaches, confusion, memory loss and tremors associated with Parkinson's Syndrome.

Attitudes towards concussions have changed

since Ciancaglini's boxing days, and he's helped bring about some of that change in New York state.

"Through my story, my goal is to educate athletes about the life-altering mistakes that I made, with the hope that no one will suffer the same fate as me," Ciancaglini said. "Concussions are hard to prevent. You play clean and you play hard, but they're going to happen. (Second-impact syndrome is) when an athlete who has already sustained a concussion sustains a second concussion before symptoms from the first injury can properly heal."

The Hornell City School District has taken steps to protect Maple City youths from second-impact syndrome. Hornell is one of over 3,300 schools that will take part in a program sponsored by Dick's Sporting Goods.

Before kicking off the fall sports season, Hornell athletes will complete an ImPACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) concussion test. This test provides a pre-concussion baseline of brain function. If players are suspected of suffering a concussion, taking another ImPACT test will tell if the player has returned to full health or not.

The test can take around 40 minutes, said Hornell Athletic Director Scott Carroll — a wise investment if it can prevent a player from returning to the field at less than 100 percent. Suffering from one concussion leaves an athlete more vulnerable to a second, Ciancaglini said, and the effects are cumulative.

Hornell isn't just testing its athletes. The district plans to administer the ImPACT test to every student in grades 7-12.

"Dick's Sporting Goods donates the money to offset the initial cost of setting up the software, so that we can purchase enough licenses to test not just our student-athletes," said Hornell Superintendent Doug Wyant. "We've taken it a little bit further than

what Dick's is offering. We've gone out and purchased enough licenses to test every student in 7-12.

"We'll test our athletes right now before they start their seasons, but once school starts we'll be testing every child that enters the district in grades 7-12. You can hit your head at any time. Concussions not only affect your athletic performance, but more importantly it impacts your academic performance."

One of the Ciancaglini's mottos is "leave no doubt, wait it out." Concussion symptoms can surface hours or even days after an impact, he said, so it's important to err on the side of caution. A lingering headache, concentration problems and changing sleep patterns are just a few of the signs of a concussion.

"If we think something has happened, we're going to take the stance that it might have happened, and we're going to make sure it gets checked out," Wyant said. "One concussion is enough. If you don't fully recover and you sustain that second impact, you may be affecting your career and have that life-long impact that Ray has to endure."

Ciancaglini presented Wyant with a signed pair of boxing gloves in gratitude for the school's efforts.

"Honesty is the most important thing," he told the Hornell students. "Your coaches, trainers and school staff are looking out for your well-being above all else, but you have to help them do the best they can for you. You have to be totally honest about your symptoms."

"Sitting here tonight, I was very impressed and happy, but not surprised, to see that this school system has implemented the impact preseason testing. That's a very good test."

The concussions may have hit Ciancaglini hard, but he has dealt a counterpunch of his own. Forty years after his last appearance in the ring, he has yet to be knocked down.