

A Champion for Prevention: Ray Ciancaglini

ROLF GAINER PH.D. | MAY 18, 2015



Rolf Gainer and Ray Ciancaglini (right)

Life takes people down some interesting streets. Last month, I was participating in the 2015 Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Conference when I met Ray Ciancaglini. Ray is a retired boxer who fought from 1966 to 1974 when his career was brought to an end due to the effects of multiple concussions which occurred in the fight game. Like many athletes, Ray shrugged off the effects of these injuries and went to fight in states where his suspended New York Boxing license wasn't an issue until the multiple concussions took their toll. Ray went on to found The Second Impact, a non-for-profit organization devoted to preventing Second Impact Syndrome in athletes through identification and treatment of concussion. Ray spoke about his career in boxing, his multiple concussions and the effects they have had on his life and his focus on prevention through seminars he presents at schools, colleges, training camps and other places where young athletes run the risk of concussions. Ray is an amazing speaker who tells his story from his heart and speaks with the conviction of his experiences. He truly cares about the problem and doesn't want athletes to experience what he lives with every day.

What brought Ray and I together occurred at our exhibit for the Neurologic Rehabilitation Institute just after Ray finished his keynote presentation at the conference. Ray said to me that NRI wrote a story about him and his work through The Second Impact in June 2013 in this blog. When I told Ray that I was involved with NRI, something clicked as we spent the next two days attending conference sessions and talking with Ray and his wife, Patricia. Ray is candid about the effects of his injuries, namely his ongoing battle with Parkinson Syndrome and Dementia Pugilistica. Ray is active with Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy or CTE research studies at the Boston University School of Medicine and has donated his brain to them upon his death.

The reality is that Ray is very much alive and active in his life and work. He is member of the Rochester New York Boxing Hall of Fame and the Geneva New York Sports Hall of Fame. He has received the Public Policy Award by the New York State Brain Injury Association for his work to create sports concussion legislation. He is the recipient of the prestigious Camp Good Days and Special Times Courage Award. In short, Ray Ciancaglini is a champ.

I asked Ray if he was willing to work with us on another story and he graciously agreed. I want Ray's message about the effects of unidentified, untreated concussions to be heard. It's not often in life that one gets to meet a true champion and I'm sure that readers of NeuroNotes will agree.