

Notable Vanier Alumni

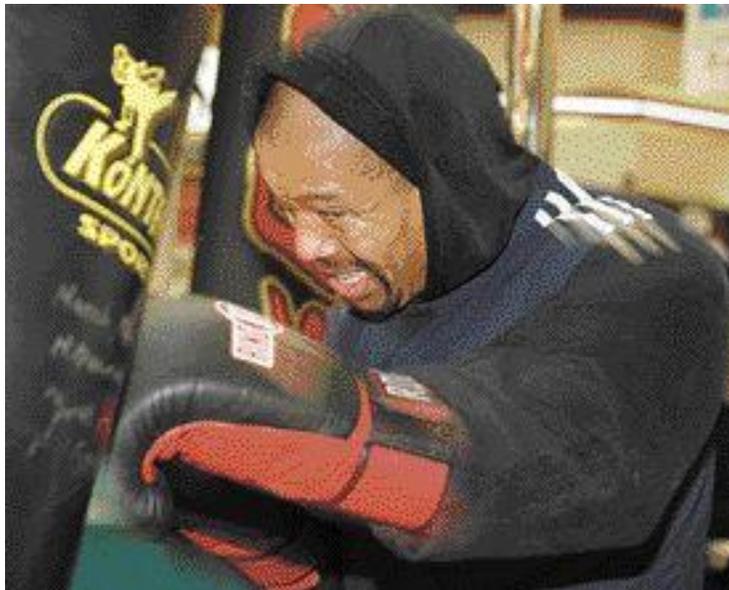
A Warrior Hangs 'Em Up

Otis Grant, who surprised everyone when he returned to the boxing ring after a near-fatal car crash, has decided to retire after 42 fights

By Jack Todd, The Gazette

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There was a little sadness in Otis Grant's voice yesterday - but not much. After 42 professional fights, a world title and a stellar 38-3-1 record, Grant is hanging up his gloves.



In his own mind, Grant probably retired after absorbing the worst beating of his great career in a TKO loss to Librado Andrade at the Casino last April. But Grant took his time to make an announcement; Yvon Michel and his GYM group wanted him to go on fighting and making money. Wife Betty would have supported him either way. Howard Grant, his brother and trainer, was adamantly opposed to seeing Otis back in the ring, as were his parents.

"I'm getting out," Grant told me yesterday. "I'm just waiting to make it

official. They tried to get me to keep fighting, but I've had enough. Right from the get-go when I got into this comeback (in 2003, four years after he was almost killed in a traffic accident) I always told them that if I lost, I was out."

Grant will turn 39 two days before Christmas and as he said yesterday: "I have nothing left to prove in boxing." So he will make it official Monday at the Casino. There will be his announcement, a speech or two, a boxing card in his honour.

The card will include his long-time buddy Herc Kyvelos, who was in the van with Grant and Grant's daughter, Alexandria, at the time of that near-fatal crash.

Notable Vanier Alumni

It will be an emotional night. Cover one of Grant's fights and you will see a host of familiar faces, the same faces that have been with him from the beginning, with some additions along the way, because he is the kind of man who attracts loyal friends. Even the rift with long-time trainer and manager Russ Anber has been healed and Grant extended a personal invitation to Anber to attend the festivities next week.

Grant had battled his way back from that horrific accident to become the WBC's No. 1-ranked super-middleweight contender, but he dropped to No. 4 after the loss to Andrade, then to 11th, then off the charts altogether. He won't be back.

"I can walk away holding my head up high," Grant said. "I was told I could never fight again, but I didn't fight bums on my comeback. I will walk away knowing I could still compete against world-class fighters, but I lost one bout and it's time to go."

Grant said yesterday he believes he might have returned to the ring too soon after surgery for a serious sports hernia before that bout against Andrade, but he isn't the type to worry over spilled milk.

"If I came back again," he said, "I'd have to have the same surgery on the other side and I don't want to do that."

Besides, there is no end of things for him to do outside the ring.

"It's not like boxing is all I know how to do," Grant said. There is looking after Alexandria and his son, Andrew, training world-title prospects at the Grant Brothers Gym, working for the Otis Grant Foundation.

And promoter Michel is expected to announce that he has come to terms with Grant on an agreement that will see the newly retired fighter step into an undetermined role with GYM, the details of which are to be refined today.

I first saw Grant fight at the Pan American Games in Indianapolis in 1987, 20 years ago next summer. He began his pro career with a four-round decision over John Gross on Nov. 29, 1988 in Montreal and fought his second bout here before beginning his long stint as a wandering warrior.

Because boxing people felt that the Grant brothers did not draw in Montreal, he fought in Hartford, Conn., Philadelphia, Albany, N.Y., Hamilton, Ont., Halifax, Niagara Falls, Ont., Las Vegas, Boston, Rochester, N.Y., and Baton Rouge, La. It was in Boston that he suffered his first loss at the hands of Quincy Taylor when he was floored for the count by a flash left hook in the waning seconds of the 12th round.

Notable Vanier Alumni

That was in 1994, the day before I started this job. I would be lucky enough to be at ringside in Sheffield, England, when Grant won the WBO middleweight title on Dec. 13, 1997, with a courageous, 12-round decision over Ryan Rhodes.

Some of Grant's fondest memories of his career are bound up with that fight. First, there was the camaraderie of the long training camp in England, with Anber working his corner and Howard Grant serving as training partner and chef. Then the victorious bout itself, and then the homecoming.

"When I came back to Montreal with the title, I hadn't fought in Montreal in years. Then first, I got this huge reception at the airport. That felt so good. Then Ronald Corey invited me to a Canadians game and I was introduced at centre ice and given a standing ovation. They went on for two minutes, applauding and applauding."

Still, Grant remained on the road until his comeback - but during those eight bouts, he traveled no farther than Quebec City. Now he's at the end of the boxing road, donating his time for free to the Otis Grant Foundation in the scramble to do everything from helping out other organizations to getting meals for the poor at Christmas.

Because in and out of the ring, Otis Grant is a special man. He will be missed as a boxer, but he has made the right decision, retiring with his faculties intact and a long and honourable career behind him.

For information on how to donate to the Otis Grant Foundation, call 514-858-0905.