

Wisp of a man still has punch

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By [HERB ZURKOWSKY](#), THE GAZETTE

Dear all:

This is an article about my 91 year old father, Abe Pervin that appeared in the Montreal Gazette, the major Montreal newspaper. I thought you might like to see it.

Best regards,

Elaine

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Abe Pervin, 91, still trains young boxers four days a week at Centre Claude Robillard in Montreal. "He's like family and means everything to me," featherweight

Lucia Larcinese says of Pervin, who has been in the corner for her two professional fights.

Photographed by: JOHN KENNEY, THE GAZETTE, The Gazette

He's there at Centre Claude Robillard most afternoons during the week, training amateur boxers, this wisp of a man. At 5-foot-5 and 165 pounds, he doesn't seem strong enough to don the pads, step into the ring and allow others, including a heavyweight, to punch the palms of his hands. In his running shoes, red monogrammed shirt and red pants, there would be little differentiating him from the other coaches, apart from his streak of gray hair.

And this: Abe Pervin is 91 years old.

He's been involved in the fight game since 1935. He has seen some of the sport's legendary figures, and worked the corners of the best professionals the province of Quebec has produced, including Donato Paduano, Fernand Marcotte, the Hilton family, Eric Lucas, Stephane Ouellet, Leonard Dorin, Adrian Diaconu and Lucian Bute.

"It's the most remarkable thing I've seen. I've never seen a guy (Pervin's age) go to the gym daily," said Guy Jutras, a renowned international referee and judge. "To see this guy give

advice, to get in the ring and let them hit and to do it daily, it's the most remarkable thing I've seen."

A widower since 2000 following the death of his wife, Ann -they were married 59 years -this father of three, grandfather to five and great-grandfather to three more, Pervin continued living in his Cote St. Luc apartment until several months ago, when he began suffering bouts of hallucination. Now a resident of the Castel Royale retirement home, Pervin most days drives his 2001 Buick Century to the Ahuntsic training centre.

His voice doesn't resonate as it once did, he wears two hearing aids and has been hospitalized for congestive heart failure and pneumonia but, incredibly, continues making the trek to the gym, rain or shine, 12 months a year. Pervin was the head coach of the Canadian national team at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, when he was already 56. Three decades earlier, at age 21, he spent four years in the army during the Second World War, although never going overseas while with the Coastal Artillery 103rd Battery.

"I do the pads, work and instruct them. I do it with the big boys and the small boys. It has become second nature," the legendary Pervin said in his endearing manner. "That heavyweight (Donald George), when he hits, he hits. But my hands and reflexes are used to it.

"When I get tired, I sit and rest," Pervin admitted. "But I've been dealing with youngsters all my life. Now that I'm in a seniors' residence, I find the people are too old for me. The (amateur boxers) work with me, respect me and look after me; they don't let me pick anything up. I don't feel 91. I'm not saying I feel 50, but I don't feel 91. Besides, what else am I going to do ... sit around and watch TV and go down for my meals?

"I watch hockey at night. That's enough," Pervin said.

He trained at the old YMHA, located two blocks from his home on St. Urbain, one of many promising Jewish amateurs of that era. Forced to abandon his career after contracting a painful skin condition, he turned to coaching while working as a salesman. His career as a trainer has taken him to 15 countries; with Pervin serving as the inspiration to countless others. To this day, he remains highly respected, with people gravitating to him because of his infectious presence.

"In my 32 years of boxing, and I mean this sincerely, he's one of my dearest friends," said Russ Anber, a longtime Montreal trainer, both in the amateur and pro ranks, and commentator. "I've got all the time in the world for him. He was a mentor to me. If you proved to him you were there for the love of the sport, were willing to learn and wanted to do it, he had time for you.

"I went to his 90th birthday party. We all feel he's going to be around forever. I hope I have that longevity in boxing."

Anber's not alone. The people Pervin has touched feel a compelling desire to remain ingrained in his life. There's no better example than Lucia Larcinese, a 38-year-old professional boxer who got her start as an amateur under Pervin, winning Golden Gloves and Quebec Cup championships under his tutelage. When Larcinese turned pro three years ago and began working out at the Grant Brothers on the West Island, Larcinese ensured, on the rare occasions she fought in Montreal, the ageless Pervin would work her corner.

Larcinese is effusive in her praise for Pervin, crediting him for keeping her motivated, calling him her mentor and voice of reason, while looking out for her best interest.

"What more can I say? How many times I was discouraged and he uplifted me," said Larcinese, who has ventured to Nevada, Florida, Pennsylvania, New York state and Ontario, boxing only 11 times over three years while attempting to pave the way for future female pugilists in the

province. "He taught me discipline and character. He's helped me out with promoters and pushed me."

Their relationship could not be more diverse. Pervin, admitting he doesn't approve of women boxers; Larcinese, a licensed nurse who said she feels compelled to watch over him, calling it a labour of love.

She calls him daily, in the mornings, just to make sure he's feeling well. And they even have been known to socialize -at least when Pervin, who goes on an occasional date with an 85-year-old woman from his nursing home -when he can fit her into his calendar.

For Larcinese, whose parents divorced when she was 8, and whose father died when she was 23, Pervin has become an influential male figure and friend.

"I'd rather see him than go on dates," said the physically stunning brunette.

"It's fun to go with him and talk boxing. I've become a boxing bible because of him. He has helped me through a lot of my personal problems. I feed off him. He doesn't judge me. He gives me his opinion.

"He means everything to me," Larcinese continued. "He's like family and pretty much became a father figure. He's the word of reason when I'm down or flustered. He settles me down and says the right things. I'm blessed to have him and I'll become a basket case if he goes."

Pervin, who has been inducted into the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame, won't live forever, of course. But neither does he have any immediate retirement plans.

"As long as I can and I'm able to," he said.

"As long as I can go with the flow and feel up to it. I like the game and the people I meet. And the gym keeps me occupied.