

The Fighting House Brothers

Written by Story and Photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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Life in the 1940s was not even close to the politically correct society of today. It was rough, and tumble, especially for the four brothers who grew up in Dilkon, AZ.

Their mother was from the Oneida Tribe of New York state, while dad was Dineh, and fighting quickly became a past time for all of them, even though there was seven years difference between the oldest and the youngest. But it is the life of the oldest, Gordon, that is the center of this story.

By 1940, the 15-year old House had won the first of three consecutive Golden Gloves championships in three different states, NM, AZ, and NV. Gordon even appeared on a fight card for the Third Annual 20-30 Club Boxing Tournament in Gallup, in 1941, fighting in the 105-pound experienced class against a T. Otero of Crownpoint. The fight card listed 22 bouts in 10 weight classes with a variety of experience, officiated by Dave Jackson and Sam Service,

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and judged by Wade Duffey and Guido Zecca of Gallup and Lloyd White of Cortez.

House was living in Ft. Defiance at this time and after of couple more years of amateur fights – over 159 - joined the Marine Corps. Before that his official biography listed his schooling at Phoenix Indian School and Ft. Wingate High.

The Marines sent the young scrapper to the South Pacific but he returned in 1945 to become the All-Service Champion after being wounded on Tinian, one of the island hops the Marines captured. He returned to pro boxing in 1946 and started fighting as a pro at the young age of 20.

Gordon faced off with the best of the Lightweights in his short career, including Sandy Saddler, who he knocked out in their fight only to see him recover after Saddler was saved by the bell in January, 1950. Saddler recovered well enough during the break to earn a TKO over House in the following rounds. A newspaper headline at the time blasted the news to sports fans by declaring, “Champion Saddler avoids scalping at the hands of an Indian.” House is described in the 1981 program for the Navajo Nation Golden Gloves Tournament as the first and only Navajo/Oneida Indian to fight a professional World Champion and is enshrined in the World Hall of Fame. House was never knocked out in any of his pro fights.

Gordon was written about in several magazines and quite a few newspapers of that era, described as a “Lightweight with a Heavyweight punch.” And pictures of him in a feathered headdress helped build his reputation. Boxing records in that era are sketchy at best, but Gordon fought between 50 and 70-plus times in the five years between 1945-50, earning three professional state titles in 1948 - all within 10 months of each other - in Texas, Nevada and Arizona.

Once Gordon was married, he moved with his Anglo wife to her hometown of Baytown, Texas so she could be near her family and they produced a son and a daughter. It became his ultimate error in life as he was shot and killed by his wife’s mother and brother in 1950 at the age of 25. No charges were ever brought against either shooter.

Gordon left behind a powerful legacy. His professional record is listed among Professional Greats for his percentage of KOs he delivered. These better known names include: Joe Louis,

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Jack Dempsey, Sugar Ray Robinson, Rocky Marciano, Willie Pep and others.

By the time of his death, his three younger brothers, Johnny, Lloyd and Oscar had stepped into the ring and had varying experiences. All served in the Far East, where Johnny became the Armed Forces Korean champion, while Lloyd also won the All-Service Championship at 145-pounds. Oscar, almost seven years younger, served in Korea, too, but that conflict was coming to a close. Oscar is better known these days as a terror on the pool tables at both the North and South side Senior Centers in Gallup, and provided all the material for this article.

Johnny retired from Transwestern Pipeline Co. and with his wife produced five boys and four girls. He named one of his sons after his older brother. Lloyd earned a Doctorate in Education and has three daughters and a son. Oscar was married for 40 years and his wife gave him four sons. He earned a Bachelor's degree from SW Oklahoma and a graduate degree from A.S.U. and retired from the Navajo Nation. Oscar was also the first Native American named as a Production Supervisor with General Dynamics before he worked for the Nation.