

detailed with regard to Sullivan's personal life and several of his more important fights.

Also from the bookshelf ...

Alfonso Teofilo Brown was born into horrendous poverty in Panama in 1902. At age 21, he boarded a vessel in the Canal Zone as a stowaway, was pressed into service peeling potatoes after he was discovered and jumped ship in New York (then the capital of the boxing world).

During the course of a 20-year ring career, "Panama Al" compiled a record of 129-19-13. In 161 fights, he was never knocked out. He was freakishly tall (5 feet 11 inches) for a bantamweight and was boxing's first Hispanic world champion. Complicating his life, he was gay.

"Black Ink," by Jose Corpas, (Win by KO Publications) tells the story of Brown's life.

Boxing was a different world then. As Corpas recounts, "Eyes were thumbed, kidneys were pounded and laces were dragged across faces until blood flowed. A coddled prospect being fed a steady diet of carefully selected stiffs on the way to a 20-and-0 record was virtually nonexistent and impressed no one the few times it occurred. Fighters fought whoever was available."

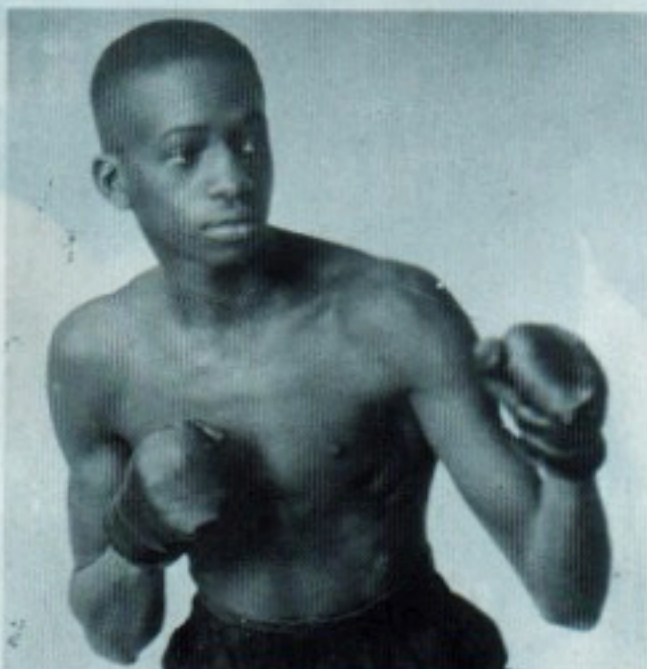
Social customs were different too. Brown spent most of his adult life with one foot in and one foot out of the closet. He lived for a time in Paris (where the French writer Jean Cocteau was his lover and manager), spent profligately on clothes and developed a fondness for betting on horses.

He was often instructed to carry

opponents, lest it become too difficult for him to get fights.

Brown's ring career was marred by heavy drinking that evolved to cocaine and heroin use. He contracted syphilis and, later in life, was arrested multiple times for drug-related and other criminal offenses. During his final years, he lived homeless on the streets of New York. He died in 1951 at age 48.

Corpas has researched his subject



Panama Al Brown left everything in the ring.

extensively, particularly in online newspaper archives throughout the world. His writing is a bit sloppy at times, and Brown's many fights tend to blur together in the recounting. But the book has a powerful undercurrent.

"It wasn't just the money that drove Brown," Corpas writes. "The feeling that consumed him when the bell rang had no price. When the bell rang, he was chief, king, the boss. And everyone watching knew it. For someone who was often told that he should be ashamed of who he was, that feeling of superiority was

addictive. The respect and awe his ring dominance earned him spilled out into the cabarets and streets, where Brown was often the richest, most famous and toughest man in the room. When he couldn't box, he was a poor, skinny, gay drunk."

But the inevitable happened.

"With each work of art," Corpas observes, "he left a piece of himself in the ring. When he climbed out of the ring for the last time, there was almost nothing left."


Cleaning out old files

is an adventure. I never know what I'll find. Recently, I was going through some notes on a telephone conversation I had with Dan Goossen years ago.

"I'm sitting here with Pete Rose," Goossen said proudly.

That piqued my interest because, among other things, I'd heard that Rose participated in several amateur fights when he was young. So Dan put Pete on the phone, and I asked Major League

Baseball's all-time career hits leader about his ring exploits.

"I was 14 years old," Rose told me. "I had two fights and lost them both. The second one was against a guy who had five kids at ringside watching. I didn't get knocked out. But I did say to myself, 'I better go play ball.'" 

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thouser@rcn.com. His most recent book - "A Hard World: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing" - was published recently by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.