



Small was a touted prospect, until a shady stabbing took him off course. He's never been able to grasp the "everything happens for a reason" angle to the attack.

## **EDDIE SMALL: What Might Have Been**

### **By Robert Mladinich**

Onetime welterweight prospect Eddie Small, who compiled a 6-1-3 (1 KO) record during a career that lasted from 1963-69, was walking through a Costco warehouse in Las Vegas in mid-August when he received a phone call that put him into orbit. The caller was Ray McCormack, a retired NYPD sergeant who had competed in the New York City Golden Gloves tournament for several years in the early seventies. McCormack had moved to Las Vegas a year prior and just a day earlier had qualified with his firearm at a local range so he could be part of that city's Department of Homeland Security (DHS) volunteer force.

The conversation between McCormack and the instructor somehow turned to boxing and the instructor told McCormack that another member of the New York City law enforcement community had qualified the day before. Looking over at the ledger, he said his name was Eddie Small.

McCormack, who at 53 is eight years younger than Small, remembered Small fondly. The instructor gave him Small's number, and McCormack wasted no time calling him.

"It was like I hit a royal flush," said the 61-year-old Small, who is a retired captain from the New York City Corrections Department. "Ray's name sounded very familiar, but I couldn't believe he was telling me more about my career than I even remembered."

After being put in touch with Small by McCormack, I met Small and his wife Lois for dinner while in Sin City on business on August 19.

What a tale he had to tell. What happened to him inside the ring was nothing compared to what happened outside of it.

He grew up above the old time luncheonette that his parents owned in the North Bronx. It was called the Char-Rock Luncheonette and it was no different than the scores of candy story/luncheonettes that you see in classic New York films of yesteryear like "Somebody Up There Likes Me," which chronicled the life of Rocky Graziano.

In the late fifties and early sixties, local boxing heroes like Bobby Halpern hung his fight posters on the wall there.

Although Small was Jewish, he boxed out of the Mt. Carmel CYO under the watchful

eye of the colorful Charley Caserta. He made it to the semi-finals of the 1962 Golden Gloves tournament. He says he beat the best guy in the tournament, Johnny Scott, but lost to the worst, Louis Ponce.

During his amateur career, which produced a 67-7 record, he was described at various times by the New York Daily News as "a crack flyweight" and "the most spectacular of 126 pounders." He sometimes traveled on teams that included the now famous referee Joe Cortez.

Small said Cortez was or is "a great fighter, a great person, and a great referee." One of Small's 1962 Golden Gloves victories, a stoppage of Allan Stein, landed his photo on the back page of the Daily News. By mid-day, that page seemed to be taped to the window of every commercial establishment in the Bronx.

"I even made the back page of the national edition," said Small. "It was hung up in my class at Roosevelt High School. I'll never forget how happy and proud I was." When the Daily News, which sponsored the Golden Gloves tournament, was on strike in 1963, Small turned pro at the age of 17. His manager was Bobby Gleason, who ran the fabled gym that bore his name in the South Bronx.

After seven fights, Small's record was 4-1-2 (0 KOS). As far as he was concerned, he should have been undefeated. Complaints to Gleason about how he was being handled generated nasty responses. There were other problems as well.

When the syndicate that was backing behemoth heavyweight James J. Beattie was interested in signing him, Small tried to opt out of his contract with Gleason. He was flatly told no.

"Gleason had a reputation as a nasty guy," said Small who, at his current 160 pounds looks incredibly fit. "I didn't want anything to do with him, but was stuck with him."

During that time, Small was generating quite a buzz and a lot of press coverage. In 1963, he was the subject of an ABC television show called "What Americans Want to Know." It described his transformation from being a standout amateur boxer to the pro ranks.

The June 1964 issue of The RING magazine named him Prospect of the Month. After several bouts at Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, the New York Post reported that he and other New York favorites Lenny Mangiapane and "Irish" Bobby Cassidy were ready to "graduate" to bouts at Madison Square Garden, where Small debuted in February 1964.

Various newspapers called him "a classy Jewish battler" or wrote that he turned in "a nifty performance."

The loss and the draw notwithstanding, it seemed like Small was going places. However the momentum he had generated came to an abrupt halt in broad daylight on August 23, 1964, while he waited on a Bronx street for his girlfriend. They had a date to see the movie "A Shot in the Dark" with Peter Sellers. Suddenly a car pulled up and within minutes Small's life was forever changed.

A West Indian guy, who had a beef with Small for reasons he can still not fathom,

attacked him with a steak knife. The assailant's mother was wielding a tire iron. Small was brutally stabbed in and around his left eye.

The blade missed his eyeball by a centimeter. Although he spent several weeks in the hospital, he miraculously did not lose his sight in that eye.

"I thought my life was over," said Small. "I was in surgery for eight hours and needed 2,000 stitches. I've had a lot of plastic surgery since."

To this day, Small suspects that Gleason was somehow involved in the attack. Two years afterwards he returned to the gym and received no sympathy from his former handler. Instead, says Small, "He told me, 'I told you, if you don't fight for me, you won't fight for anybody.'"

From a legal perspective, having a hunch and proving a hunch are two entirely different things. But one thing that Small was certain of was that he wanted to continue fighting.

Although it is not on [boxrec.com](http://boxrec.com), he came back in November 1968 with a victory over Jimmy Edwards in New Jersey. He has the news clippings to prove it. He was now trained by Victor Valle, who would later nearly bring Gerry Cooney to the heavyweight championship, and he felt as if he was in good hands. But his face was busting up too easily from the scars. After two wins and a draw, he packed it in in February 1969.

"It's sad when I think of what coulda been," said Small. "They say things happen for a reason. I still don't know what the reason is."

Small joined the corrections department in 1972. He admits that he often dreamed about meeting his assailant behind bars, but he never did. He got in plenty of scraps at the jails in which he worked, but because of his proficiency with his fists compared them to the "preliminaries" he fought as a youngster.

He retired from the job in 1993, went through an ugly divorce, and remarried a few years ago. He and his current wife reside in Las Vegas, where Small stays in astonishingly good shape by walking, squatting with weights, bowling, and banging the heavy bag.

Should Las Vegas ever come under attack, he is more than willing to defend it as a member of the DHS volunteer force. His body is lithe and muscular, his hands quick and his mind sharp. Even a blind man would immediately sense that, even though he is in his sixties, Small would be a handful.

He has two sons from his first wife, one of which runs the Orange County Boxing Club in Middletown, New York. He also has a stepson from his current wife. He and his wife recently attended a Dion concert at the Sun Coast Hotel and Casino. Back in the days when Small was fighting as an amateur, Dion and the Belmonds, who hailed from the Bronx, were tops on the charts.

In attendance was actor/director/writer Chazz Palminteri, whose play "A Bronx Tale," was made into a sensational movie starring Robert DeNiro and Palminteri. Small introduced himself and told Palminteri that his father, Larry Palminteri, had referred many of his amateur bouts at the CYO.

He told Palminteri that he had watched "A Bronx Tale" at least 100 times. "I guess you didn't like it," joked Palminteri.

Other than that, Small's life was relatively humdrum until McCormack's phone call came out of the blue. It reminded him of something that is so easy for many of us to forget.

Throughout our lives we have the ability to leave indelible impressions on others, regardless of who or what we are. More often than not, we won't even know it. Perhaps it's a smile to a stranger, the subtle passing of a dollar to a vagrant, or a kind word to someone who needs it.

McCormack remembered Small not only as a fighter of great promise, but also as a true gentleman and neighborhood hero for all of the right reasons.

"Hearing from Ray meant the world to me," said Small as he and I went through each and every page of his three scrap books that chronicled his immeasurable dreams, all of which seemed to be on the cusp of coming to fruition before fate intervened.

"My wife has as much interest in boxing as my dog," he continued. "To be remembered and to show these books to someone who remembers all these people, and loves and appreciates this stuff as much as I do, that means the world to me."

**Source:** [Robert Mladinich](#) @ [TheSweetScience.com](#)