

Former boxer speaks about concussions in Union Springs. B1

The Citizen.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2012

AUBURN, NEW YORK

75 CENTS

SPORTS.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2012

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B1

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INSIDE

National Hockey League.....

Major League Baseball.....

Local Sports.....

National Football League.....

B2

B2

B3

B6

CONCUSSIONS

Ciancaglini delivers message

Former boxer, that championed Concussion Management Awareness Act, speaks at Union Springs

Ben Meyers
The Citizen

UNION SPRINGS | Ray Ciancaglini remembers with vivid clarity the inspiration that led him to boxing.

He was watching his grandfather adjust the rabbit ear antenna of the old 20-inch Admiral TV to watch Carmen Basilio fight in the bar of the family restaurant.

"Once he got it everyone roared," Ciancaglini said after

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To hear more from Ciancaglini click over to auburnpub.com/sports to listen to a podcast of the post-talk interview with him.

he spoke with students at Union Springs High School on Wednesday as part of "Meet the Coaches" Night at the school about the dangers of multiple concussions.

Ciancaglini wanted to be like his hero who beat middleweight champ Sugar Ray Robinson in 1957. He went into the back, got a sack, filled it with linens and started giving it the old one-two.

His grandmother came in and yelled at him to get back to work and go to college.

Over the next months he

scraped together 35 cents every four weeks to get a copy of Ring Magazine and read about Basilio. The seed was planted in his head.

Now, on his bad days — after suffering multiple undiagnosed concussions while boxing — Ciancaglini struggles to tie his shoes and can't recall the names of friends.

Ciancaglini remembers, again with vivid detail and clarity, the first punch that began his spiral. He was 16, he took a right hook in the third round of a fight in Buffalo to the back of the head.

"I never experienced it before," he said to silent student-athletes and parents in the auditorium. "I fought through it and I won a unanimous decision."

See Concussions, B3



Sarah Jean Condon, The Citizen

Former middleweight boxer Ray Ciancaglini speaks to students and families at Union Springs High School Wednesday evening about the effect of concussions in sports. As a result of the concussions received while boxing, Ciancaglini now suffers from dementia and parkinson's.

Concussions

Continued from B1

He doesn't throw the last part in for adoration.

It is part of the message. At the time of that first punch, Ciancaglini was an honor student and projected to have a pretty successful career in the ring. Of course, getting hit is part of boxing, but this was different. Something was wrong.

He felt lethargic and slow after taking that punch. He shook it off. Had to be just the fight, he thought. The symptoms — he convinced himself — were temporary. He lied to himself and went through the ropes at the War Memorial in Syracuse a week later.

Again, the memory of the second punch is clear.

This time the blow — that snapped his head so severely that his brain literally slammed into the inside of his skull — came in the first round. He vomited into the spit bucket in the corner. He lost that night and didn't realize it until a reporter asked him for some comments afterward.

Neither time did he go to the canvas. Not even a knee. Neither time did he lose consciousness or stop fighting.

That second punch led to the fog that he still is in. He talks about "the fog" a lot.

After the second impact, the most dangerous part of any concussion, Ciancaglini's life changed. His brain was broken. He would sleep for 14 hours at a time. He was confused often, his grades slipped, he failed in school, and he became a behavioral problem.

"I was fooled," he said. "I thought it was temporary."

The most dangerous part of multiple concussions is not the initial injury. In fact, the brain can nearly fully recover from a first blow. A second concussion is more likely, similar to the idea behind a dislocated shoulder, but if enough time to heal is given and proper medical help is followed the likelihood of major problems after a concussion are relatively minor according to multiple sources, including the American Academy of Neurology. The major issues occur — of which Ciancaglini is living proof — when a second concussion occurs while the first is still trying to mend. Concussion consequences are cumulative according to The Mayo Clinic.

"Headaches are part of this game," an old timer told him in the gym, as Ciancaglini remembered. "You have to dish it out and take it too. If you can't this game isn't for you."

"It wasn't bad advice," Ciancaglini said without venom. "They, we, just didn't know any better."

He compensated for what he thought were "temporary symptoms" with aspirin for the headaches that followed. Aspirin thins blood to help alleviate pain. Ciancaglini took so much that during a fight he received a small cut over his eye that simply would not stop bleeding. It cost him the fight.

After his career ended in 1972 he fought depression to the point where he threw away much of his memorabilia.



Sarah Jean Condon, The Citizen

Former middleweight boxer Ray Ciancaglini, left, speaks to students and families at Union Springs High School Wednesday evening about the effect of concussions in sports. As a result of the concussions received while boxing, Ciancaglini now suffers from Dementia and Parkinsons.

Concussion symptoms

In adults:

- Headache or a feeling of pressure in the head
- Temporary loss of consciousness
- Confusion or feeling as if in a fog
- Amnesia surrounding the traumatic event
- Dizziness or "seeing stars"
- Ringing in the ears
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Fatigue
- Concentration and memory complaints
- Irritability and other personality changes
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Sleep disturbances
- Psychological adjustment problems and depression
- Disorders of taste and smell

Symptoms in children

- Listlessness, tiring easily
- Irritability, crankiness
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Lack of interest in favorite toys
- Loss of balance, unsteady walking

"I just didn't make it," he said shaking his head and throwing up his left hand, the one that isn't shaking, and letting it strike his thigh.

He got a job at Eastman-Kodak in Rochester that he had to give up due to hand tremors — he has developed dementia pugilistica, among other ailments — then he started talking about what had led him to that point and eventually Union Springs a week before Halloween.

It was tough.

Most people didn't believe him at first.

"Did I do this for a Badge of Honor or Courage?" Ciancaglini rhetorically asks. "No."

"The hardest part of everything was proving to the naysayers that this was real."

Then the NFL and NHL had a rash of brain injuries. The public recognized Troy Aikman, Steve Young, and Sidney Crosby and listened to what Ray Ciancaglini had to say.

His talks are free and entitled "The Second Impact." His Facebook page and website (thesecondimpact.com) have gotten the attention of ABC News among many others. The word is getting out.

The Concussion Management Awareness Act was passed into law in July in New York and stipulates education about and removal from play for concussed athletes. It isn't hyperbole, nor bias, Ciancaglini thinks it will save lives.

"I dedicate my life to this, outside of my family," Ciancaglini said. "There is nothing more heartwarming than if I can just get to one (person) it is all worth it to me."

On Wednesday, he wore a simple short sleeved white shirt with a patterned green tie. His arms and forearms are large and he sometimes sways into the old fighter's guard with his left hand raised just in front of his right when catching his balance. His hands still shake when he holds the microphone, but his handshake is strong.

There is silver lining to the career in which Ciancaglini won the Golden Glove Heart Award for "most outstanding determination and resiliency," but cost him a fully functional brain.

"It is tricky because you can't see it," Ciancaglini said. "They heal like other injuries. It isn't like an ACL or a torn labrum, but you are coming back for another day as long as you are patient."

Ciancaglini was the one that thanked the school, athletic director Todd Salls, and the assembled students for having him for the night.

He gave the school a signed boxing glove in appreciation.

Something to remember him by.

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