

## Rudell Stitch

Celebrating Our History | boxer Rudell Stitch

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Nearly 55 years after Louisville boxer Rudell Stitch drowned while trying to save a friend in the Ohio River, he was honored for his sports accomplishments and his heroism.

Stitch was inducted into the Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame in June, a year after being honored with a Kentucky Pride Foundation "hometown heroes" mural on the 4th Street Live parking garage, next to the Cathedral of the Assumption on Fifth Street.

He also was awarded two Carnegie Hero Fund Commission medals — both for lifesaving efforts.

Stitch was one of the top-ranked welterweight boxers in the world when he died in 1960 at age 27. His widow, Rosa Mae Stitch, was shot and killed in her Prospect home four years later at age 31, leaving behind their six children, Rudell III, Donald, Rodney, Perry, Darryl Lamarr and Janet Lynn.

### HISTORY

Stitch grew up in a poor neighborhood around 13th Street in west Louisville, near the railroad tracks, according to a 1978 Louisville Times story. He worked out at Bud Bruner's gym on Shelby Street and had a job at a meat packing plant, salting and stacking 90-pound cowhides, Bruner said in the story.

Stitch often went to the gym in the afternoon, after eight hours on the job, and sometimes got up at 3:30 a.m. to run in a park near his home.

"As a boxer, he was capable of imposing fierce physical demands on himself, and it paid off in the ring," the story said. Stitch "could punch, and he could box," Bruner said. "He was tremendously strong in the shoulders."

Stitch started his professional boxing career in 1956. A turning point came after Bruner got him a bout with Charlie Cotton, who was having trouble finding ranking welterweights willing to fight him, the story said. Stitch won in a knockout.

### RIVER HEROISM

In 1958 Stitch was fishing beside the Ohio River when he rescued a stranger, Army Corps of Engineers worker Joseph Shifcar of Elizabeth, Ind., who was swept into the river near the McAlpine Dam, a Courier-Journal story said.

"Although the area beneath the dam was known to be very dangerous for swimming, Stitch plunged in and brought the injured man safely ashore," a 1962 Presbyterian Life story said. In 1960, according to the Louisville Times, Stitch was fishing with Bruner and his son and another friend, Charles Oliver, near the dam when Oliver slipped and pulled Stitch into the water. Stitch tried to rescue his friend, but neither man surfaced, and the Coast Guard brought up their bodies.

Thousands of people attended the viewing session for Stitch at Hope Presbyterian Church and 1,200 attended the funeral at Central Presbyterian Church, according to Presbyterian Life. A memorial fund was set up, and the National Boxing Association established the Rudell Stitch Sportsmanship Award in his memory.

## STITCH'S RECORD

Stitch won 45 of 57 amateur bouts in his career. He won Kentucky state titles in 1951, 1952, 1953, 1955 and 1956. That last year he reached the semifinals of the Chicago Golden Gloves and the finals of the National AAU Tournament.

## ROSA MAE STITCH

In January 1964, Rosa Mae Stitch was killed in what was thought to be a murder-suicide incident. Philander Bryant, 44, of S. 18th Street, was found next to her and died the next day at General Hospital.

Evie Rice, Rosa Mae Stitch's mother, had been living with her daughter and grandchildren but was spending the night with her sister the night her daughter was shot, according to The C-J.

In 1964, Cassius Clay talked of organizing a boxing exhibition with Stitch's brother, Rudy, to benefit the Stitch children, a C-J story said.

## WWW.RUDELLSTITCH.COM

The website listed with the smiling visage of Stitch on the Fifth Street mural says he was one of Muhammad Ali's heroes and that Stitch sparred with him, then Cassius Clay, when Ali was training for the 1960 Rome Olympics. It ends with: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

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