

DRUMMER FEATURE ARTICLE

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Satire: Some chickens give you fat lips...

Photographs by David Sparrow and Jack Fritscher

NOODLES ROMANOFF AND THE GOLDEN GLOVES (Who is Noodles Romanoff and why is he eating shit?) by Jack Fritscher

- This entire feature article "Noodles Romanoff" is also available in Acrobat pdf.
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AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



DRAFT VERSION



Written November 14, 1978, and published in *Drummer* 29, May 1979.

This is satire of real people doing real sports sex; so the names and places have been changed, but the *mise en scene* is absolutely accurate. Actually, at the Golden Gloves in San Francisco, David Sparrow and I took several black-and-white rolls of 35mm photographs of which I published three with two directly erotic boxing photographs by Lou Thomas, Target Studios. In 1979, we libbers presumed we were equal enough with straight culture that we could publish photographs of straight men shot in public places right next to photos of gay men shot in private events.

Earlier, in *Drummer* 20, January 1978, with my gay sports article, I'd published hot photographs of straight athletes such as quarterback Ken Stabler and baseball player Ron Cey with athletic photos of Burt Reynolds, Sylvester Stallone, and Carl Weathers—alongside “out” football player, Dave Kopay. No one objected, probably because, then, as now, many straight people feel that the world of gay publishing—magazines and books both—is not really publishing, but rather something beneath “real” publishing. *Drummer* 20 also fills in the background of John Handley of the Manhattan Boxing and Wrestling Club with photos shot by David Hurles (Old Reliable Studios) one famous night at a private boxing ring in the third-floor attic of a grand Victorian in San Francisco when the Bay Area Boxing Club took on Handley and his New York Wrestling Club.

“Noodles Romanoff” is, of course, a comic amalgam of personalities in the colorful gay fight game. In homomasculine culture, boxing is a metaphor of two men coming to grips with one another through the use of fists; for that reason, I have often featured boxing and gut punching in many videos I have written and shot: *Gutpunchers* 1 and 2; *Punch and Boots*; *My Nephew, My Lover*; *Rough Night at the Jockstrap Gym*; and the midnight classic, *Hot Lunch*.

Truth be told, the Golden Gloves culture in San Francisco connected homomasculine men who boxed and who were coaches directly with heteromasculine men also boxed and coached. Boxers can compete in the Golden Gloves up until their thirtieth birthday. Naturally, the police and fire departments have many contenders. The night David Sparrow and I shot the Golden Gloves we witnessed an amazing scene of wild boxing frenzy that we could not forget—and then that night came back to us with a punch line when Supervisor Dan White assassinated Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in City Hall. Our actual experience that evening I worked into the fictive narrative of *Some Dance to Remember*.

The passage in Reel One, Chapter 16, of *Some Dance*, reads like this.

The gay men on “Castro could hardly regard Dan White objectively. They knew no more about him than the way he was the November morning he took his gun in hand. Murder is the ultimate passionate act. I saw Dan White box his last Golden Gloves fight, three days before he turned thirty. He was tough, cocky, aggressive. Brooks Halls at the Civic Center was filled with cops and firemen. White had been a fireman before he had been a cop. Once on either force, always on both forces. The traditional rivalry between the police and fire departments jelled into a mutual cheering as their Danny Boy punched the lights out of his opponent. The referee had to pull him off the other fighter several times, sending him to a neutral corner to cool down. Always the beefy young White tore back to ring center, jabbing, punching, pounding. He was determined to win his last fight. He was determined to show his stuff to the cheering crowd of his department buddies. He was tougher than Rocky. He was meaner than an amateur fighter need be. Head bent, advancing, going for the kill, he was determined to crown his Golden Gloves career with a final victory. He had a passion for confrontation, the more public, the better. Sweat and blood flew with his last punch. He flattened his opponent and stood dancing and jabbing over his prostrate body for the count. ‘He murdered the guy,’ they all said.

“I remember a Dan White no one else seems to remember, his arms raised in victory, with the crowds screaming pleasure at his win, which seemed to me more than a ll. I remember his passion as he danced around the ring, dripping sweat and blood, touching his gloves to the outstretched hands of the cops and firemen who stormed the ropes to touch their champ.

“Dan White had passion.

“I think Dan White had more real passion in his trigger finger than there is in most of the drug-hard cocks at the baths. Harvey was a victim of whatever White’s passion was, and if this is not to simplistic, it was that, besides all his political reasons, he was murdering in Harvey Milk, the very homosexuality he needed to murder in himself. Anyone who saw Danny White box could see he was a driven man.”

The point of including this passage from *Some Dance to Remember* is that while living the ’70s, I was plowing through the decade with three aims: to gather material for *Drummer*, as well as for my personal journals I had kept since age fourteen—all of it collected while working on the manuscript for *Some Dance to Remember* which I

intended from its first written words in 1970 to be an historical novel written as the events occurred, because I knew in 1970 that something had happened to change gay men in substance and appearance as sure as Virginia Woolf was certain that in YEAR everyone's look changed from the past to the present tense. That novel is in a sense the "Drummer novel." In it, my *Drummer* experience is detailed in the magazine edited by the novel's protagonist titled *Maneuvers* as well as a competing magazine titled *A Different Drummer* magazine. –Jack Fritscher, February 14, 1997

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Good old Noodles is one tough boxer. He has his name, "*Noodles Romanoff*," embroidered in gold script across the back of his maroon sateen robe. He wears a white towel collared around his neck. Noodles, 32, is a big blond Pollock. For reasons of the ring, he surrounds himself with the mystery of the last of the Romanovs. He has even adopted the misspelled name of the long-lost Russian royal family.

The only thing Noodles has in common with the Czars is he's a bleeder.

BLOOD AND GUTS

Some boxers have glass jaws. Some, jelly bellies. Noodles bleeds. Really bleeds. If it's a pleasure to watch any man do anything well, then Noodles is a triumph of blood. In a ten-round bout, he makes hemophilia seem about as serious as a sneeze.

Noodles is definitely a Pollock's Pollock: he is blond, and hung, with the kind of chub that oozes out of a jock gone to seed. Noodles bloomed early with a Golden Gloves trophy and then he faded.

What else?

The Golden Gloves, after all, is mostly just ugly little boys beating each other up.

Noodles, Brooklyn born and bred, hangs out—where else?—at the Mine Shaft. Mostly because he was once on the periphery of John Manly's Manhattan Boxing and Wrestling Club (MBWC).

Noodles knows everything about boxing. He's taken more punches than a Long Island railway ticket. His cherubic blond cheeks, dragging 30, bloom like varicose tomatoes. Ain't nothing pretty about Noodles, except for the boys he picks up. Noodles is an authentic Everlast bum.

Those who can, box; those who can't, coach.

Noodles coaches.

After all, everybody's got a gimmick.

EVERLAST(ING) LOVE

Noodles has his own complete gym and boxing ring set up in his Bowery loft. Ain't nothing pretty about his loft either. Except for the ring. Noodles has it authenticated down to the tautest Everlast turnbuckle.

"So ya want a exhibition?" Noodles asks. He pulls the leather boxing headgear down tight around his head. He and his boy for the afternoon each slip the white gum rubber teeth protectors into their mouths. Saliva runs. Noodles grins. His belly heaves. He dances around under the hot overhead light of the ring.

His sparring partner is a young Puerto Rican with a cock he had to fold in half in order to tuck it inside the leather-padded jock cup. When he can, if they'll let him, Noodles casually helps his boys suit up properly. "For their own good," he says. And he is, he's quick to tell them, the coach. "Nothing is too good for Noodles's boys."

SLOW BOXING IN THE BIG CITY

Without boxing, Noodles is a zip.

With his boxing ring as a come-on, he runs a Better Boogie. What could be a safer reality than coaching a revolving set of tattooed Appalachian runaways and various shades of brown-skinned street toughs?

Noodles like to try and beat the shit out of smart-ass kids.

More often, the hot young punks beat the crap out of him.

That suits Noodles. He takes it like a man. He likes the smell of sweet young sweat sparring around him; the feel of a long muscular arm jabbing at his face. He likes to wait for the guard a young dude drops, so he can smash the wise-ass face hard. He sets the streetcubs up so they punch back. Hard. He likes the clinch of sweaty brown skin against his white Pollock belly; the spit of Newyorican breath panting near his ear; the thud of leather gloves, slick with Vaseline, punched into his face. He likes the licking of black blood off his own thick gloves; the sight of his own warm blood splattering him and his partner both.

BEAT ME, DADDY

The word is out on Noodles. But the whispers only help his game. His sparring partners—like all hustlers of whatever tough stuff—stough—let him have enough to keep him wanting more. A couple of years ago, Noodles' rich family paid him plenty to get lost. Noodles can score a sparring partner for fifteen bucks flat. Word is that the harder they make it for him to mess them up, the more Noodles tips. The more they mess him

up, the more he pays.

That kind of inflation only leads one way.

Too bad. Because Noodles is basically a jockster cocksucker with a fetish for beating around very large bushes to get the small little bushes he snorts like finest crystal.

HOW RIPE WAS MY FETISH

Noodles' gym has lockers for his long list of partners' gear. Noodles has never yet let a young PR take his jock, socks, or soaked cotton sweatshirt out the door.

They know. They talk.

They stow their gear in Noodles' lockers and come back to find their stuff exactly, sometimes even more exactly, as they let it. Most of the time. How can you trace the track of a tongue up the silk-smooth seam inside sateen trunks that ride up the crack of sweaty brown ass? And, shit, they whisper, the more you pound the fucker, and the more you sweat, the better he likes it, and the more he pays. And besides, Noodles coaches a pretty good workout.

Last month, he found a switchblade stuffed inside a sweat-sock stuffed inside a high lace-up boot.

For Noodles, living on the cusp of danger is the only hardon.

THE LAST OF THE ROMANOFFS

John Manly, the "foundling" father of the Manhattan Boxing and Wrestling Club, when asked about Noodles Romanoff, shakes his head. "Noodles knows about boxing. After all, he's taken all the punches."

Then Manly bites down hard on the large knuckle of his index finger and rolls his hand away from his mouth. "Noodles," he says, "is the kind of guy whose mouth one of these days is gonna write a check that his ass can't cash."

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ILLUSTRATIONS