

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine —
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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Oct 11, 2012 - Issue 489

Gay Boxer Knocks Out a Stereotype Inclusion

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe
BC Editorial Board**

I could have never imaged an openly gay professional boxer. Then I found Orlando Cruz. This 31-year-old Puerto Rican featherweight is revving up to challenge Mexican boxer Jorge Pazos for the World Boxing Organization's (WBO) Latino title. Cruz has a good chance at it.

"I've been fighting for more than 24 years and as I continue my ascendant career, I want to be true to myself," Cruz said in a statement. "I have and will always be a proud Puerto Rican. I have always been and always will be a proud gay man."

Cruz has been boxing since the age of 7. He ended with an amateur career record of 178-11, winning seven Puerto Rico National titles. Today, this 2000 Olympian left-hander is ranked as the World Boxing Organization's No. 4 featherweight fighter, and is 18-2-1 with nine knockouts.

Cruz is not only fierce in the ring but he is also fierce for having the courage to come out. As an old bastion of heterosexual masculinity, Cruz, as well as today's female boxers, is breaking down walls and dispelling stereotypes.

"I want to try to be the best role model I can be for kids who might look into boxing as a sport and a professional career."

While Orlando Cruz is not the only gay professional boxer in the history of the sport, he is, however, the first to make it public.

"I developed physically and mentally to take such a big step in my life and in my profession, which is boxing, knowing that it would have pros and cons, highs and lows in this sport that is so macho," he said. "I kept this hidden for many, many years."

Cruz comes out with the full support of his mother, sister, trainer and manager. He depicts, however, his father's as this: "Like every father, he wants his son to be a full-blooded man," Cruz said. "But he is aware of my preference, my taste."

Also Cruz comes out at the time when there is more acceptance of LGBTQ people worldwide, even in machismo Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico that now have and flaunt an openly gay-accepting culture - within limits.

Societal attitudes have changed greatly in these Latin American countries since the International Lesbian and Gay Association, a Brussels-based NGO, reported that in 2005 a gay man or trans person was killed approximately every two days somewhere in Latin America solely because of his or her sexual orientation. In Brazil alone, hate crimes against gay men were so alarmingly high – 2,509 gay men were murdered between 1997 and 2007 – the government in 2004 launched a campaign against homophobia. Today, such countries as Argentina, Brazil and Mexico City allow same-sex marriages and Colombia and Ecuador recognize same-sex unions.

In 1962, a gay boxer would never conceive of coming out. To be called or perceived gay would be a career killer. Like most people in the 1960's, people of African descent were homophobic. A point of view that holds true today. Afro-Caribbean U.S. Virgin Island boxer, Emile Griffith, felt he had to avenge not only his career but also his manhood with a killer punch when his Cuban opponent, Benny Paret, taunted him with the homophobic epithet "*maricón*," the Spanish equivalent of "faggot." Griffith, told *Sports Illustrated* in 2005 that he struggled with his sexuality stating, "I like men and women both... I don't know what I am. I love men and women the same, but if you ask me which is better... I like women... But I don't like that word: homosexual, gay or faggot."

Griffith knocked out Benny Paret.

Paret never got up and died ten days later.

When the news came out about Cruz being gay, Twitter messages abound expressing concern whether future boxers will be reluctant to fight him.

"Orlando has proven to be an excellent boxer with very good chances of becoming a world champion," Dommys Delgado, president of the Boxing Commission of Puerto Rico, said brushing aside homophobic comments. "We do know that it is a very macho sport. Those who don't want to fight with him, well, don't fight."

In a sport where supposedly only heterosexual men have the physical brawn to pummel their opponents, homophobic challengers would fear being teased by fellow pugilists and fans for getting in the ring with Cruz. But their greatest fear is being beaten by Cruz.

"It should show something for itself: that I have courage, I'm a warrior in the ring," Cruz said. "It should not diminish me. I've fought with the best, and I want to be a world champion."

And if Cruz wins the WBO title against Pazos, he'll be the first to knock out a stereotype.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member and Columnist, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. She is the Coordinator of the African-American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). As an African-American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

