

Boston Herald - Joe DeNucci Ponders Legacy, Remembers Ted Kennedy
By Joe Fitzgerald - 8/31/2009

Joe DeNucci turned 70 yesterday, a plateau that invites reflection.

“It’s a funny figure,” he said. “I know the years are flying by, but 70 just sounds different. Hey, I feel good and I can still throw punches at the bag in my basement. It’s just that when I was growing up, anyone 70 was an old, old person to me.”

And that might have been his waking thought yesterday if the passing of Ted Kennedy had not given him more to think about.

“What would I like to be remembered for? Ted’s tributes got me thinking about it,” DeNucci said late last week. He had just returned from the Hall of Flags where he stood in line, waiting to add his comments to a memory book.

Once the world’s fifth-ranked middleweight boxer, he served a decade in the House of Representatives before becoming auditor of the commonwealth 23 years ago.

“As I stood there I was remembering the first time I met Ted. It was at a convention. I was just starting out, a political nobody.”

His use of the word “nobody” brought a story to mind here.

Shortly after winning the auditor’s post DeNucci attended a Golden Gloves reunion in Lowell. When he arrived he was greeted by the fighters as the man of the hour, one of their own who had gone on to great heights. Dozens of hands reached out to him, including one from an unfamiliar pug who said, “You don’t know me, Joey; I was a nobody.”

DeNucci turned, embraced him and said, “Don’t you ever call yourself a nobody. If you’ve ever climbed those three steps into a ring and stood there half-naked, facing a man who could take you out with one punch, then I have the greatest respect in the world for you, my friend.”

When that story was related to him, he smiled.

“I remember that very well,” he said. “But that’s exactly how I felt the first time I met Ted. Politically speaking, that was me; I was a nobody, but yet he made me feel like a somebody, and it wasn’t as if he was putting on an act, trying to be nice to some pain in the neck.

“He looked me in the eye and listened to me as if I was someone who mattered to him. And I’m sure I’m not the only one he treated that way.”

So DeNucci wrote in the book, “Ted, you’ll never be duplicated.”

It’s a memory that never went away.

“He could make you feel you mattered to him. He certainly made me feel like a somebody.

“If I could be remembered for that, I’d be very happy.”