



FERDIE PACHECO

DEC 8, 1927 - NOV 16, 2017



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Born to a Spanish-Cuban immigrant family in Ybor City in Tampa, Pacheco died in the Baypoint neighborhood of Miami that he had lived in since the 1950s. “That’s a long time. And he stayed in Florida even when he worked with NBC. They wanted him in New York but he didn’t want to leave,” his daughter said.

The Fight Doctor was so proud of his adopted Miami home he once said of Ali: “Cassius Clay was born in Louisville. Muhammad Ali was born in Miami.”

When Pacheco’s medical practice at Northwest 10th Street and Second Avenue in Overtown burned to the ground during the McDuffie riots in 1980, he donated the land to the local church and quit medicine. He figured he would never top the memories he made there.

For example, there was that time when Ali, who died in 2016, agreed to visit Pacheco and his patients inside that Overtown medical practice.

The Fight Doctor had one simple request of The Greatest: Be low key. Don’t be, well, Ali.

“Come to my office and when my patients come in, don’t try to give them money, don’t make any promises to them. Just be nice to them. Just see if you can stay there from 9 to 1. I don’t want you to announce that you’re there because I don’t want a riot,” Pacheco said he told Ali as he reminisced with the Miami Herald in 1990.

But this was silver-tongued Ali, whose fists and footwork were only outmatched by his mouth.

Naturally, Ali alerted the media. When Pacheco pulled up to his office, a big ABC News truck sat outside, running cables into his clinic. Ali couldn’t help but razz Pacheco over the shabby condition of the waiting-room furniture.

“This is why my people can’t get quality care,” Ali sniffed before the cameras. “Look at this place.”

Pacheco pulled Ali aside. “This is the waiting room,” the physician told the pugilist.



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“This waiting room is made so my customers feel comfortable coming in here and sitting down. You notice that back there, where the medical work is done, is clean. “This office is here so people in this neighborhood can come from work and don’t have to go to some Miami Beach doctor’s office and stand in the waiting room because they’re afraid to sit down,” Pacheco continued counseling his photogenic boxer. “Go ahead, sit down, I can wipe off the leather. These are people that might work 12 hours in the sun. I don’t want someplace where they’re afraid they can’t sit down next to someone because they might smell.”

Ali tossed that around in his head for a bit, then sheepishly told his doc, “Oh, I didn’t think of it that way.”

Pacheco, whose father J.D. was a physician, started his medical practice after earning his medical degree from the University of Miami in 1959. He served as a pharmacist in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

“The big important thing for him was helping people,” his daughter Tina Louise Pacheco said. “He wanted to be a good doctor and cure people.”

Later, he joined boxing trainer Angelo Dundee’s corner at the famous 5th Street Gym in Miami Beach.

There, he became intrinsically linked with Ali — The Greatest.

Before the Miami Dolphins’ perfect football season in 1972, and long before the Miami Heat, Miami Marlins and Florida Panthers, the epicenter of sports in South Florida was a rough-hewn, sweaty boxing temple, accessed by a flight of sagging steps leading up to the 5th Street Gym. There, for 15 years, one could find Pacheco and the Dundee brothers, Angelo and Chris, at Ali’s side.

The Greatest trained there for his history-making match against Sonny Liston at the nearby Miami Beach Convention Center in 1964, when the-then Cassius Clay defeated the favored Liston and won his first heavyweight championship title. Sports Illustrated called the bout one of the five greatest sporting events of the 20th century. Clay would soon convert to Islam and change his name to Muhammad Ali. As Ali, he faced pressure from his new community to make changes among his team. He chose to stick by Pacheco and the Dundees.

Pacheco served as Ali’s corner man and personal physician from 1962 to 1977. The



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gym, which Pacheco called “our earthy equivalent of the kingdom of Oz,” was torn down in 1993.

Pacheco kept the gym’s rubbing table.

He became almost as famous as Ali. He never had to wait for a table at Joe’s Stone Crab in Miami Beach. NBC hired Pacheco to do boxing analysis on television, a role he played for 19 years following his retirement from ringside in 1981. He won an Emmy award in 1989 for his production, writing and commentary on the special, “February 25, 1964: The Championship.”

“He called so many amazing fights from the years 1981 to 2000; it’s hard to mention them all,” his daughter said. “If it was a must-see boxing event during those years, Ferdie was on the air giving his opinion and commentating.”

He had opinions where Ali was concerned, too, which would lead Pacheco to split from Ali after a bloody 1977 bout in which boxer Earnie Shavers decimated Ali.

Pacheco, noting troubling physical changes in his fighter, urged Ali to retire. He refused.

“When Ali was showing signs of damage, even as a commentator, he tried to illuminate some of the dangers in the sport and implement some safety policies, like having EMTs at every match,” Tina Louise Pacheco said.

Years later, in 2002, Ali, who was then suffering from Parkinson’s disease, embraced Pacheco and through slurred words whispered, “You was right,” Tampa Bay Times reported. They had long stopped working together, but the friendship remained intact.

In later years, Pacheco traded the world of boxing gloves for literary adventures. He became a noted painter and author of numerous books, including his memoirs, “Ybor City Chronicles.” On canvas, he was inspired by Norman Rockwell and he immortalized everyone from Ali to President Barack Obama.

“Art is what I do,” Pacheco told the Miami Herald in 2009 at an exhibition of his works in Dania Beach.

Once asked about what it was like to work with Ali, Pacheco eyed a packed room of students and faculty at the University of South Florida and revealed another side of his persona, an earthy sense of humor, the Tampa Bay Times reported.



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“What was it like to be Ali’s fight doctor?” Pacheco asked. “It was like being Queen Victoria’s gynecologist. The title didn’t mean much, but the view was spectacular.” Pacheco is survived by his wife Luisita, his children Tina, Dawn, Evelyn and Ferdie Jr., and two grandchildren. Services are pending.

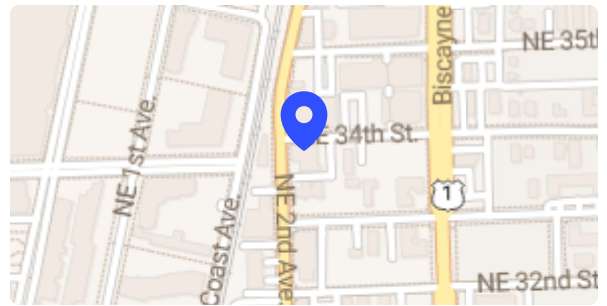


Events

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Cemetery Details

 **Van Orsdel Crematory**
3333 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami FL 33137





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