

THE GUARANTOR  
By Jay Waitkus

Donny Simms sat apprehensively on the trainer's table. The butterflies were already churning.

"Don't be nervous," his manager, Cal Burton, said. "This one's a lock."

"A lock?" Donny asked. "Grady's big-time."

"Mac Grady ain't nothin' but a washed-up bum," Cal replied. "We take him down and move on to the next fight, same as always."

"He used to be in the top ten."

"Used to. A lot can happen to a fighter in five years. Remember that. Make your money when you can."

"I hear you. How big's the crowd out there?"

"Pretty big. There's some promoters from back East in the front row. My guess is they're here to look at us."

"You serious?"

"Damn straight. Grady's a has-been, but he's still a name. We beat him, we might get a shot at a ranked heavyweight. After that, who knows?"

"A title fight? You think?"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Donny. We take care of business tonight, then we take it from there. OK?"

"OK."

"Good. We got a lot riding on this one."

"On account of the promoters."

“There’s something else. I probably should have told you sooner.”

“What?”

“I made a bet on the fight.”

“How much?”

“Ten grand.”

“Ten grand? But Cal, that’s all our savings. What are we gonna do if I lose?”

“You’re not gonna lose.”

“But what if I do?”

“You won’t. Where’s Colton?”

“Right here,” the young cornerman said, as he entered the small room. “It’s almost time.”

“Get me that container of talcum powder,” Cal instructed.

“Here you go,” Colton said.

“No, not that one. The one on the left.”

“What’s the difference?”

“The difference is I want the one on the left.”

“Here.”

“Thanks.”

“My hands are wrapped a little tight,” Donny said.

“It’ll be OK,” Cal promised, as he sprinkled the powder over his boxer’s taped fists. “Colton, give me that water bottle.”

Colton gave Cal the bottle. Cal poured the water over Donny’s hands.

“That better?” Cal asked.

“Yeah,” Donny replied.

An attendant stuck his head inside the door.

“You guys ready?” he asked.

“All set,” said Cal.

He, Colton, and Donny stepped into the hallway.

“My arms feel kind of heavy,” Donny said, as they made their way down the ramp.

“It’s just nerves,” Cal assured him. “Now listen. When the bell rings, it’s important you get the first shot in. I don’t care what kind of punch you throw, just make sure you hit him first.”

“Why?”

“Why the hell do you think? Grady’s bigger than you. And stronger. And meaner. And — and you need to establish yourself. Get it?”

“Yeah.”

“Do what I say, Donny, and this fight is ours. I guarantee it.”

“But what about the money? What if I —”

“Don’t worry about the money. Just make sure you hit him first.”

As the fighters were introduced, Donny felt his knees grow a little weak. Mac Grady used to be a top-notch fighter, for God’s sake. He was four inches taller than Donny, and thirty pounds heavier. What was Cal thinking betting all their money? But then Donny looked over at Cal, who still seemed so cocksure he would win.

*Jesus, he really believes in me,* Donny thought. No-one ever had before, so it wasn’t something he’d come to expect. But it felt good. Donny made himself forget the money. What counted was Cal believing.

The bell rang. Donny took Cal’s advice and led with a jab that landed. It didn’t look like much of a blow, but it rocked Grady back on his heels. Donny followed with a hook to the ribs. To

his amazement, the punch doubled the bigger man over. Donny reared back and hit Grady with an uppercut. Grady fell against the ropes. Donny closed in and pounded his opponent with a flurry of punches.

A right cross sent Grady to the canvas. The crowd roared. The referee counted. Less than a minute after the opening bell, Donny Simms had won the biggest fight of his life.

Everyone at ringside was euphoric, no-one more than Colton, who pounded the ring apron triumphantly.

“Can you believe it, Cal?” the young man exclaimed. “It’s like he hit him with cement!”

Cal would have replied more quickly, but he was too busy counting zeroes.

“Yeah,” he finally acknowledged a few seconds later, “our boy sure packs a wallop.”