

Become a Contender

By Hap Hansen

When I was nearing retirement, I started writing newspaper columns for several dozen small town, weekly newspapers. Here is one of my columns, written in 1992 for those weeklies:

Years ago, the heavy weight boxing world was about to witness another embarrassment. The undefeated champion had destroyed all the contenders but one. The one remaining was an aging pug with a so-so record. His 240 pound body was layered in fat instead of muscle and his face looked as though it had been hammered by countless two-by-fours. In a television interview, the contender's wife was asked about her husband's chances against the undefeated Heavyweight Champion of the World.

She said, "If you're going to drive a Volkswagen at the Indianapolis 500, you had better know a helluva shortcut!" It would be fun to report that the contender won the fight. He didn't. He was mercifully knocked out with 15 seconds gone in the second round. When asked later if he would demand a rematch, the fallen warrior said, "As long as I am a contender, I will fight for the champion's belt." Here was an individual who thought he was better than he really was. And because he thought that way, he was at least a contender. He got the opportunity to win.

Those who think they are not as good as they really are, never become contenders. Never get the chance to win. So it is with small communities who are searching for business and industrial growth. Those communities who think they are better than they really are, become contenders in this competitive world. They are the ones who get new business and industry to consider locating in their towns and to have existing businesses grow and expand. Those communities who know they don't have much to offer, and act that way, never get the opportunity. And that's all you can ask for – to get the opportunity to become a contender. Knocked down, knocked out and battered, those communities who believe in themselves will rise again, to face the challenge, to become contenders.

That's the choice for your small town. Get knocked down and stay down for the count. Or rise again to fight another day. Fight first to work on your image. If your town is still wearing polyester bell-bottoms while driving a Studebaker in a wrinkle-free cotton, sports car world, change now and become a contender for the crown that may await you. It will be time well-spent.