Welcome to the North End! The home of authentic Italian cuisine and a plethora of historical landmarks. Since the 1630s, this Bostonian neighborhood has housed an enclave of European settlers, making it the city’s oldest and proudest community.\(^1\) However, these narrow streets have more notably housed generations of Italian immigrants since the 1840s.\(^2\) One of its most recognized and celebrated residents, champion title boxer Tony DeMarco, stands etched in bronze stone at the entrance of the community's corridors. Get off the T at Haymarket Station and walk down Sudbury Street to be greeted by this stupendous statue of Italian lineage.

Standing in front of Mother Anna's Restaurant and Bar is the bronze boxer, who’s sculpted perfection by Hary Weber joins a conglomeration of work including iconic athletes Bobby Orr and Doug Flutie.\(^3\) The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame and the Privitera Family Charitable Foundation have paid homage to Boston’s greatest athlete through their commission contributions.\(^4\) This 6-foot tall shrine has commemorated the accomplishments of Fleet Street’s Sicilian living legend since 2012, making it a modern-day representation of the people in the neighborhood.\(^5\) Unlike the famous counterparts of neighboring statues, Tony DeMarco was able to witness the unveiling

\(^2\) Ibid.
of his own memorial on October 20th of 2012. In a sea of stone success stories that feel detached from the centuries of deceased generations, this statue holds relevance in the hearts of many today.

Best known for his champion title wins, DeMarco has drawn crowds to the Boston Garden stadium from 1948 to 1962. Born in 1932 under the name Leonardo Liotta, this World Welterweight champion had his birth certificate forged to compete at only 16 years old in his first professional match. After knocking out Mestor Jones in his first round on October 21, 1948, DeMarco would go on to compete against eight World Champions. His success was marked after winning the Welterweight Championship of the World against the famous Johnny Saxton. The undisputed knockout of Saxton on April 1, 1955 in the fourteenth round solidified his stardom. However, his epic championship matches against hall-of-famer Carmen Basilio went down in history as two of the top ten greatest boxing battles of all time later that year. It wasn’t just Basilio who was held in a headlock those many rounds; the unflinching back-and-forth fights left audience members in a state of breathless suspense. Despite losing his victorious title to the “top ranked contender” in the 12th round of their second match, DeMarco’s 58 wins out of 71 matches, and battles against other famous boxers like Paddy DeMarco, Teddy "Red Top" Davis, Chico Vejar and Don Jordan, has made him a Bostonian legend. After training under renowned boxer Frankie Waters and breaking attendance records at the Boston Garden Stadium, DeMarco has been commemorated with his own street name “Tony DeMarco Way” in the North End by Mayor Thomas Menino, and inducted into the Italian American Hall of Fame in Chicago.

Titled “The Flame and Fury of Fleet Street,” this North End native embodies the success story of Italian-American immigrants. While Paul Revere and Christopher Columbus have their commemorative

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6 Conti and Babb, “Tony DeMarco Statue Unveiled at Historic Ceremony in North End [Photos].”
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Conti and Babb, “Tony DeMarco Statue Unveiled at Historic Ceremony in North End [Photos].”
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Conti and Babb, “Tony DeMarco Statue Unveiled at Historic Ceremony in North End [Photos].”
grandeur established in the same neighborhood, the favorite statue amongst the North End’s residents comes from their own blood. He is memorialized not solely for his accomplishments, but for his humble beginnings that remind the citizens of urban Italian communities that they are both capable and worthy of greatness. There is a beauty in the statue’s placement at the front of the neighborhood; it serves as a memorial of honor for Italians, and all immigrants alike, solidifying that we are a force to be reckoned with in this country.

Interestingly enough, DeMarco had his humble beginning at the height of Italian discrimination. His parents, Vincent and Giacomina Liotta were both Sicilian immigrants from Sciacca, driven by dire poverty in Southern Italy that encompassed the early 20th century. From 1880 to 1924 - specifically the first ten years of the 1900s - over four million Italians immigrated to the US, fleeing the desolation of peasantry to urban landscapes of the North East. Now the fifth-largest ethnic group in the country, the Italians were originally met with disdain by xenophobic nativists that feared job competition. Immigrants were met by prejudice and predetermination by American’s who felt threatened in labor opportunities during the peak of the Great Depression. In the 1890s, over 20 Italian-Americans were lynched, and anti-immigrant hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan spiked in membership against the Italians. The press demonized the ethnic presence, with one cartoon from 1891 stating “If immigration was properly restricted, you would never be troubled with anarchism, socialism, the Mafia and such kindred evils!” Later that year, 100 Italians would be rounded up and jailed, and 19 “Sicilian gangsters” would be wrongly put on trial, for the unknown death of a chief of police in New Orleans. Despite being found not guilty, a mob of 10,000 people broke into the jail to hang and kill 11 innocent Italians.

15 “Tony DeMarco.”
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
now Italian-Americans are treated with respect in the states. This transition to an unspoken recognition of Italian presence in America would likely not have been made possible if not for tokenized leaders of the community.

    My own grandfather was an Italian immigrant, and my father a proud citizen of the Bronx. Celebrating the victories of Tony DeMarco evokes the same verklempt excitement and dignity that watching a representative Rocky Balboa movie does on IMAX.\(^{22}\) Most everyone can relate to the exhilaration of supporting a favorite sports team or athlete. It brings communities together behind a humble cause, despite all differences. Athletes such as Tom Brady (quarterback for the New England Patriots) and baseball player Derek Jeter (former infielder for the New York Yankees) may be flawed individuals, but their innate athleticism and unifying relatability has commanded attention and solidarity; placing their status of respect amongst the great gods.

    Many might question why such simple individuals not-so ancient or influential as the founding fathers might be commemorated as dignifying symbols of communities. Yet after analyzing the history and societal relevance they hold amongst average households, the answer is simple: they are beloved for their authenticity. There’s a reason why the mere 6-foot tall “Flame and Fury of Fleet Street” monument awes and engages tourists on the “Pizza Tours” of the North End.\(^{23}\) He is the embodiment of true Sicilian-American heritage for the neighborhood, in the way that the ‘grand’ Paul Revere and Christopher Columbus are not. As DeMarco stated himself at the unveiling of his monument, “This is the neighborhood that I grew up in. I have always been greatly supported by friends and family in this neighborhood.”\(^{24}\) Though his accomplishments in boxing are unmatched to the settlement of European colonizers, Tony DeMarco deserves the same cherishment and memorialization that all individuals of the North End and neighboring Italian communities do.

\(^{22}\) Robert “Rocky” Balboa is a fictional Italian boxing character of the Rocky film series.  
\(^{24}\) Conti and Babb, “Tony DeMarco Statue Unveiled at Historic Ceremony in North End [Photos].”