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## Fight Night: D.C.'s famed men's smoker goes on without founder Joe Robert

By [The Reliable Source](#)



Boxing announcer Michael Buffer and Washington Nationals "ambassadors" — diplomacy in miniskirts — auction off a ticket package including a custom chopper at Fight Night. (Courtesy of Jack Hartzman)

Thursday's Fight Night looked the same: a haze of cigar smoke, a sea of men in tuxedos and flashes of skin from the pretty young table hostesses, Redskinettes and ring girls. The annual charity smoker has thrived for more than two decades on testosterone, sex appeal and money — all for a good cause.

But, for the first time in 23 years, founder **Joe Robert** wasn't there. The philanthropist and driving force behind Fight Night [died in December](#), and the evening was a raucous gathering — including his mom, sisters, older son and closest friends — in his honor. The inevitable question: How long can the party survive without him?

"Paying tribute to Joe is not just to the man, but to the mission," said chairman **Raul Fernandez**, who took the helm in order to keep the children's education fundraiser going. The sold-out night boasted 1,800 guests in the Washington Hilton ballroom, raising \$2.2 million — not an all-time record, but one of the most successful Fight Nights in history.



Robert with his son Luke before his death last year. (Susan Biddle/The Washington Post )

If this year was a sentimental sendoff to Robert, the focus for next year and years after will be on the gala itself. "We have to keep the creativity up to make people continue to say, 'Wow!' " Fernandez told us.



Chairman Raul Fernandez and M.C. Hammer at Fight Night. (Courtesy of Jack Hartzman)

That means keeping the parts that guests like — [big steaks](#), [sexy girls](#), [boxing matches](#) — and tweaking the parts they don't. Fernandez put surveys at each table this year, and circled the ballroom for feedback. "Some people didn't appreciate the sound level of music — it was so loud they couldn't talk," he said. "So we'll fix that." He organized

two tables of "young thought leaders" to introduce the night to the next generation, naming **Winston Lord** to lead recruitment. A couple of friends from New York and Silicon Valley attended for the first time, then told Fernandez that there was nothing like it back home — so there are now plans to market Fight Night to wealthy out-of-towners next year.

Most important, it means pulling in influential millionaires. In the same way Robert tapped Fernandez years ago (they both attended St. John's College High School), Fernandez persuaded Under Armour founder **Kevin Plank**, another St. John's alum, to be the event chairman next year.

Across town at Knock Out Abuse, the ladies'-night counterpart at the Ritz-Carlton, this year's co-chairs **Charrisse Jackson-Jordan** and **Michelle Schoenfeld** got a big wet-kiss thank-you for their work: a video mash-up of "Moulin Rouge" edited so that it appeared a lovestruck **Ewan McGregor** was singing their praises. It was classic Knock Out, a party that mixes girl-power testimonials (former supermodel **Carre Otis** sharing how she survived an abusive relationship) with the giddy trappings of a high-end bachelorette party (shirtless dudes in top hats and black Speedos, cascades of champagne).

It thrives because heading Knock Out has become something of a social plum. Jordan, the wife of former Wizards coach **Eddie Jordan**, said it not only opened her eyes to the problem of domestic violence, but is "one of the hottest tickets in town. Most socialites would love to chair this event!"