What if in this corner was Carlos Monzon (11-7-70 thru 7-30-77) from Santa Fe Argentina, the middleweight champion of the '70s, and in this corner was Marvin Hagler (9-27-80 thru 4-6-87) from Newark New Jersey, the middleweight champion of the '80s? How great would this have been, Monzon vs. Hagler at their best? This is definitely one of the fights I would want to see if I could go into a time machine and punch up the fight of my choice. Both Monzon and Hagler must be included in anyone's all-time top five or six middleweight ranking, and that may be understating it.

Monzon's career got off to less than a hall of fame start. He lost three decisions during his first two years as a pro in a span of 20 fights. He would go on to avenge all three defeats before fighting for the middleweight title. In one case, he avenged one of his defeats twice and another one he avenged three times. Despite winning the Argentine and South American middleweight titles, Monzon was almost unheard of by the time he traveled to Rome to face reigning world champ Nino Benvenuti.

Hagler's career started a little better than Monzon's. Hagler would suffer two of his three career defeats in his first 29 fights. He would go onto avenge his first loss once and his second loss twice, while his third defeat came in his final fight. By the time Hagler was ready to challenge middleweight champ Vito Antuofermo, he was a top contender feared and avoided by some of the other top contenders.

Like many great champions, Monzon and Hagler share some striking similarities. They both fought in 15 world middleweight title fights, and had more than a ten-year undefeated streak during their careers. Monzon was undefeated from Oct '64 through July '77, including 14 title defenses, while Hagler was unbeaten from May '76 through April '87, including 12 title defenses. Another thing these two middleweight legends have in common is that they were the best in their division in the decade they fought: Monzon in the '70s and Hagler in the '80s. Regarding middleweight title records, Monzon ranks second in successful title defenses and Hagler ranks third (current middleweight champ Bernard Hopkins is number one). One thing to consider when evaluating Monzon's title defenses is that during the last five years of his career (1972-77) and eight title defenses, he fought with a bullet lodged in his left shoulder courtesy of his ex-wife who shot him in the forearm and shoulder during an argument.

During their careers, Monzon and Hagler fought in a very deep middleweight era. Monzon defeated five world champions (Nino Benvenuti-2xs, Emile Griffith-2xs, Denny Moyer, Jose Napoles, and Rodrigo Valdez-2xs) and Hagler defeated four (Vito Antuofermo, Alan Minter, Roberto Duran, and Thomas Hearns). When reviewing the fighters they both faced, it's difficult to determine who faced the better opposition. After a thorough review, I would break it down in two categories. From their pro-debut up to their first title fight, I think Hagler faced the better grade of fighters, but as champion, I think Monzon faced the better overall opposition from top to bottom. Fighting Benvenuti twice, Griffith twice, Briscoe, Napoles, and Valdez twice as champion and going 8-0 in those fights tilts the scale in Monzon's favor, although Hagler faced

three all-time greats in Duran, Hearns, and Leonard (going 2-1 in those fights).

Middleweight Title Fights

MONZON - HAGLER

N. Benvenuti Ko-12 - V. Antuofermo D-15

N. Benvenuti Ko-3 - A. Minter Ko -3

E. Griffith Ko-14 - F. Obelmejias Ko- 8

D. Moyer Ko- 5 - V. Antuofermo Ko- 5

J.C. Bouttier Ko-13 - M. Hamsho Ko-11

T. Boggs Ko- 5 - C. Lee Ko- 1

B. Briscoe W-15 - F. Obelmejias Ko- 5

E. Griffith W-15 - T. Sibson Ko- 6

J.C Bouttier W-15 - W. Sypcion Ko- 4

J. Napoles Ko- 7 - R. Duran W-15

T. Mundine Ko- 7 - J. Roldan Ko-10

T. Licata Ko-10 - M. Hamsho Ko- 3

G. Tonna Ko- 5 - T. Hearns Ko- 3

R. Valdez W-15 - J. Mugabi Ko-11

R. Valdez W-15 - S.R. Leonard L-12

15-0 (10) - 13-1-1 (12)

One area where these two all-time greats part ways is their personality outside the ring. Although Monzon's boxing style was not flashy, his life outside of boxing was flamboyant, garish and, some have even said, pompous. Monzon's trademarks were fast-cars, fast-women (although he was married at the time), trendy clothes and plenty of late nights out on the town drinking and smoking. Those close to him marveled at how long he was champ, knowing the abuse he subjected his body to outside of boxing. When it came to training, he only did roadwork a month prior to the fight, and it's been said many times that Monzon never went all out in sparring. During the title reign of King Carlos, his name appeared in the South American

gossip columns as often as it did in the sports pages.

As stated earlier, Monzon and Hagler were polar opposites outside the ring. Hagler lived a Spartan life outside of boxing. He was not known for keeping late nights out on the town, and was quoted often saying he liked going to bed early. He was married and stayed married until getting divorced a couple years after retiring. Hagler never let himself get out of shape, and was known to do roadwork three times a week when he wasn't scheduled to fight. When it came to training camp, he was methodical in his preparation often going away and secluding himself from the outside world. During the title reign of Marvelous Marvin, his name could only be found in the sports pages.

The boxing styles of these two legends are quite a contradiction. Their overall concept and attack plan was different, but they shared some of the same traits regarding the way they could adapt. And both fought at a measured pace. Monzon and Hagler were capable of adapting and changing their style in order to gain the tactical advantage over their opponent. Although Hagler could adjust for different styles, he wasn't quite in Monzon's league when it came to finding the holes in the style of his opponents during the fight. Hagler was better at adjusting from the first fight to the rematch with fighters who gave him trouble or defeated him. It must be noted that Hagler was murder on his opponents after seeing them the first time. These two greats were both considered as counter punchers. The difference was Monzon would fight moving forward in a subtle fashion, where Hagler liked for his opponent to pursue him. Hagler fought out of a southpaw stance (and was quite capable of switching to right-handed for short spurts). One undeniable characteristic they had in common was their attitude in the ring. Both were fearless and had the killer-instinct. Emile Griffith referred to Monzon as "Mr. Nasty" and Angelo Dundee said "Monzon had "Ice water in his veins," while Hagler fought to his motto, "Destruct and Destroy" and approached his major fights as if he was going to war.

Monzon was a tall middleweight standing right at 6 foot, and had a long reach. Hagler was just under 5' 10", but also had long arms for his height. Monzon had a jab that ranks among the division's best. He liked to hook off it to confuse his opponents before nailing them with a right hand that was accurate and carried knockout power. Many of his opponents commented after fighting him that his reach and hard jab is what they couldn't penetrate. Monzon was also very tough mentally, had total confidence in his ability and never doubted that victory would be his. Hagler was also mentally tough and fought with the attitude that he had something to prove. Hagler, like Monzon, possessed a great jab and followed it up with a devastating right hook. His straight left cross was only fair and was more effective when he used it to jab when switching to fighting right handed or when he used it to set up his right hook. Hagler's most effective combination was when he could shoot his left cross after his jab, in order to come back with his right hook to the chin. Neither Monzon nor Hagler were known to be knockout artists, although most of their title defenses ended in stoppages. It is not a stretch at all in stating that both fighters carried knockout power.

However, when rating them as punchers, I would say Monzon was the better overall two-handed puncher. They both had outstanding right hands (Monzon's was a cross and Hagler's was a hook). The difference was that Monzon's left hook was significantly better than Hagler's left cross. They both possessed granite chins, and were only badly cut in one title fight

(Monzon vs. Boggs and Hagler vs. Hearns). When it comes to who took the better punch, this is extremely difficult. Hagler was only down once versus Roldan (although it appeared to be a slip or push) and Monzon was only down once versus Valdez (in Monzon's last fight at age 35). If I were pressed to chose as to who had the better chin, I would give the slightest edge to Hagler. I don't recall ever seeing Hagler really hurt, and I think I saw Monzon shook once.

Who Would Have Won

This is about as close as a "what if" as it gets. What makes this so tough is each fighter would have fought the way the opponent would've wanted him to. Monzon would have moved forward at a measured pace, and Hagler would have moved away and countered. Since I think that this fight would go to a decision (because both had great chins and neither had the one-punch power to knockout the other), then it comes down to who I think could have gained the tactical advantage. I think the difference would have been Monzon's long hard left jab. I can see Monzon scoring effectively from the outside, while staying out of range from Hagler's hook. And if Hagler tried to press harder, he'd be vulnerable to getting nailed by Monzon's right cross. Another thing that favors Monzon slightly is he had tougher skin. If I had to pick who would be more likely to get cut, I would say it would be Hagler.

I could see Hagler gaining the advantage in one scenario. If Hagler came out early and could get past Monzon's jab and apply a strong body attack, he might possibly wear Monzon down to win the later rounds down the stretch impressively. That being said, if I was to pick the winner between the best Monzon and the best Hagler, I would pick Monzon to win a somewhat close decision. I feel he is the one middleweight who is Hagler's equal in just about every category, but holds the size and style advantage.

Writers Note

This is one hypothetical fight in which the fighters are so evenly matched, I can't see any scenario where one can be picked to beat the other with impunity. I don't care if you think Monzon wins or if you think Hagler wins, it's a close call either way. The only way you can pick this wrong is if you say that one could have beaten the other with certainty. I just can't see either fighter overwhelming the other under any circumstance.