

Alive and Well

Written by Steve Kim
Wednesday, 16 April 2003 21:00

This past weekend I was making my way to my assigned seat in press row for the massacre that was Marco Antonio Barrera- Kevin Kelley at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas when I saw Wayne McCullough in his seat right behind mine taking notes on the upcoming fight. McCullough, the former WBC bantamweight champion, has been preparing for life outside the ring by covering fights for various websites and other media outlets for some time now.

McCullough, not only looked alert and well, he looked like the picture of health. I mention this because he took a pretty frightful beating in Glagsgow, Scotland a few weeks ago in his failed attempt to win the WBO featherweight title from the rough and rugged Scott Harrison.

There were published reports coming out of Ireland that McCullough had suffered everything from a heart attack to a brush with death. It was almost as if they had already dug his grave and waiting for him to fall six feet under. To paraphrase Mark Twain, 'the reports of his demise were greatly exaggerated'.

" Hey, you're alive!!!," I told him with mocking suprise as our eyes met. He could only laugh and shake his head. With all the reports he had to read about his own demise, I guess you could say that he was surprised himself to be there.

" I did the press conference after the fights and I was walking out of the arena and felt a bit weak, my legs felt like rubber and they rushed me to the hospital because I was dehydrated," explained McCullough, of the post-Harrison aftermath." My ear was bent out of place like Dumbo or something but I was in the hospital for three days with a drip in my arm, where they put vitamins and potassium in my body. I was completely dehydrated.

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" But of course the press in Ireland said I had brain surgery and then two days later said I had a heart attack because they couldn't get any information from the hospital, they started making stories up. And they're still doing it even today in the newspapers in Ireland."

And more than a few people were surprised to see 'the Pocket Rocket' moving about a few days after his grueling bout.

" I got out of the hospital on that Tuesday, it was three days later and I walked by the Belfast City Center on Thursday, my first day out in public and everyone was coming to me,' We thought your face was mangled?!?!' I'm like,' Well, it's clear' My ears are fine, the bruises are almost all gone away on my eyes and by Friday I did a photo-shoot for one of those newspapers and they're wasn't a mark on me."

Not bad for a dead guy, huh?

McCullough has had a very storied and successful career, in addition to being a bantamweight titlist, he gave bigger men like Naseem Hamed and Erik Morales all they could handle. McCullough wasn't blessed with a big punch but the courage and heart the size of Ireland. And he possesses one of the best beards in boxing today. Which to many observers could be dangerous since he might leave him vulnerable to permanent damage in the future. Many speculated that after his loss to Harrison, that he retire. He ain't having it.

" World champions get beat, they get knocked out- I didn't get knocked out," he reasoned." I was fighting on my feet till the last bell. And then all of a sudden my own newspaper in Ireland is saying that I should retire? And I'm like why?

" I haven't even thought about it because once you start thinking about retirement- you're already retired. I haven't thought about it, I'm gonna sit down with my wife and think things over. I'll go back to super-bantamweight, 122."

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The loss to Harrison was bit of a reality check for McCullough. Harrison, he notes, is the strongest fighter he's ever faced.

" My dream fight was always against Barrera," he continued." I knew he's the best out there. Scott Harrison was a big guy, the biggest featherweight probably in history and I fought Hamed and Morales and they couldn't do the damage he did to me. Barrera's a smaller guy than me, he's a bit smaller. He's a dream fight, it's not about the money, I've made money. I've been one of the best bantamweights in history. But either him or I go back to 122 and fight whoevers down there, Oscar Larios or Guzman for the WBO belt. He's with Frank Warren my promoter, so maybe he can make that fight."

McCullough says that the criticism his corner got for not halting his bout with Harrison was not justified and he had no problems with going the distance. But you wonder what effect those last rounds will have on his long-term health.

A guy like him deserves to go out on his terms, but you do wonder if he's too tough for his own good. He's still a respected fighter with a name, so you know he won't have difficulty getting fights and perhaps he does make another run at a title shot at 122 pounds.

It's his career and life, it should be his prerogative what he wants to do with it.

You just hope he makes the right choices. But it's good to have him around alive and well, though.

KELLEY SHOULD CALL IT KUITIS

He tried to talk himself and anybody else that would listen that he was going to upset Marco Antonio Barrera. He had convinced himself and at least a few others to at least think he might be competitive.

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Well, he wasn't. And Kevin Kelley got dispatched in four efficiently brutal rounds by Barrera . From the very first time he got hit, Kelley's legs gave and his reflexes simply weren't there. Openings that were once so evident, closed up quickly.

Like a gunslinger with chamber, he could no longer

no more bullets in the pull the trigger.

And what makes this loss so painful is that unlike his loss to Erik Morales a few years ago, this time, he wasn't taking this fight on short notice with weight to lose. This bout with Barrera was made with plenty of time for a proper training camp and even more importantly, enough time to get into a proper frame of mind. He and his people swore up and down that they did everything they could to turn back the clock and Kelley looked the part physically. But like a car that has 300,000 miles on it's odometer, even an old car with a new paint job and rims, will show it's age and corrosion early and often.

There are no excuses now, Kelley, who's had a great career and who's fortitude and toughness should never be questioned, simply doesn't have it anymore.

It's time to get out.