

Winky Wright and Sugar Shane Meet Again

Written by Robert Ecksel

Thursday, 18 November 2004 18:00

The average guy on the street may not know Winky Wright, but students of the fight game do. Wright is the WBC and WBA super welterweight champ. His record is 47-3 (25 KOs). He was born in the nation's Capitol in 1971. And he is as fine a boxer and as class an act as any man boxing today.

Winky Wright is training for Saturday's rematch with Shane Mosley (39-3 35 KOs) and is hard at work in the gym, but he took some time from his busy schedule to discuss boxing, his beginnings, and Saturday's fight with Sugar Shane.

"I got started in boxing in '88 and turned pro in '90," Wright told me. "I always wanted to box, but when I was living in Washington, DC I was training in all the other sports - baseball, football, basketball - so it never really came time to go to boxing. The boxing gym really wasn't close to me in Washington, but everything else was right there, so that's what I did. But then when I moved to Florida, the boxing gym was right there and I just went to the gym. And once I started I never stopped."

The main man Winky met in the gym was his future trainer Dan Birmingham and the two of them hit it off.

"I won quarterfinals in the Golden Gloves and semifinals in the Nationals. I won a gold medal in the 1990 Olympics," Wright said. "And I turned pro after that. So I was in the amateurs only two years. I turned pro in October 1990."

Wright and Birmingham have been together from the beginning. "From round one," said the champ. "Me and my trainer work together. He never tried to change me. He just worked on what I had, my style, and he adapted to it and made it better. He didn't say 'you need to fight this way, you gotta fight that way.' It was more like 'you're good at this, you're not too good at that, so we're gonna work on this and that.' And that's what we did."

They took a good fighter and turned him into a champion.

"I'm a smart boxer, first of all, with a very good jab, great defense, and I know how to throw every punch. I don't go for the knockout," Wright said, "but I'm a good technician."

Winky was being modest. He's not a good technician. He's a great technician. In his fourteen years fighting pro, he has only three losses, all of them by decision.

"Two of them definitely should be wins and one of them, the fight with Julio Cesar Vasquez in '94, my first championship fight, I was winning, but my feet kept slipping. That was my toughest fight right there, because I kept slipping and sliding and I still fought a world champion and beat him without even being able to hold my balance. They gave him so many points for slips that he had more points, but he only beat me by two or three points, when they gave him five

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knockdowns. He won the decision,” Wright said, “but I won that fight. But these are the things that happen in life. You’ve got to learn how to overcome obstacles. A lot of people wouldn’t have overcome what I did. I still came back and won a world championship. So I did what I had to do.”

Another questionable decision loss was to Fernando Vargas in 1999. The judges that night, always an iffy proposition in boxing, were even worse than usual.

“Everybody knew I won that fight,” the super welterweight said, “but HBO had a thing with him and they had Quartey coming up and they didn’t want me to throw the monkey wrench in, so they put the switch on.”

That was then. This is now. Winky Wright’s time has come.

“That’s what I’m saying. All good things come to those who wait,” Wright said. “If I deserved it, it would have come. If I had won it earlier, then I probably would have had a big head. But now, being though it took me so long to get it, I love it even more, I learned to appreciate it, to know that this is a blessing.”

Wright has a southpaw style which, in my opinion, gives him an advantage over conventional fighters.

“Righthanders, lefthanders, it really doesn’t matter to me,” he said. “I just try to do my fight. You’ve just gotta work on your game and work on what you do best, and when you fight someone else you’ve got to learn how to adapt.”

Wright adapted to Mosley and decisioned him in March. I doubt Shane can beat Winky in the rematch.

Wright agreed: “I definitely don’t think he can beat me. But I don’t think his skills went down. It’s just that I feel he’s been overmatched. I always said that I was a better fighter, but Shane is a very good fighter - taking nothing away from him - but I just think I’m a better fighter and I had to prove it.”

Wright has proved a lot over the years and there’s little left to prove. There are some nice paydays coming his way, all of them well deserved, but after fifteen years of active duty, retirement can’t be far away.

“I’m not retiring no time soon,” Wright said. “But it’s just a sport. I’ve been chasing the topnotch fighters for a long time. It’s hard when you can’t get ‘em and you see the topnotch fighters fighting these other guys who don’t deserve it. So it comes to a point when you say, man, look, I did all I can do. They don’t want to fight me, I don’t have nothing to prove here, you know, give it up. You just say ‘I’m retired’ like Marvin Hagler did. He did it for another reason, but he walked away from the sport, because there’s life after boxing, and that’s what I’m looking forward to. I love boxing, but it’s a sport, it’s a job for me, and when the job ends, the job ends.”

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Wright is courteous, polite, levelheaded and down-to-earth. Without getting too personal, I asked Wink if he had a philosophy which keeps him grounded.

“Oh, most definitely,” he replied. “Like I said, this is my job. It’s a job that people love to see, but that doesn’t make me better than you or anybody cleaning up the hotel or whatever. This is my job. God blessed me with a talent and I’m using it. Everybody can’t be a fighter, so you gotta treat people how you want people to treat you, no matter who it is. If you respect people, they will respect you. That’s how I see it.”