

Heavyweight Boxing: Ron Lyle

Written by Jim Amato

Monday, 24 January 2005 18:00

In *The Ring* magazine's top fifty heavyweights of the gloved era, ranked 40th is a boxer who fought during the talent rich 1970s. He was a mainstream contender for nearly a decade. He fought Ali for the title in 1975 and more than held his own until being stopped in round eleven. He had Big George Foreman on the canvas twice when they fought the following year, before succumbing to the champ's power in probably the best heavyweight fight in the last three decades. His all-action shoot out with Earnie Shavers would be a strong runner up for that honor. The fighter's name is Ron Lyle.

Ron started his career late, after serving 7½ years in prison, but it did not take him long to establish himself. Wins over Manuel Ramos, Jack O'Halloran, Vincente Rondon, Buster Mathis, Luis Pires and Larry Middleton moved him up the ratings and into a bout with Jerry Quarry. Quarry was on the downside of his career and had recently suffered his second loss to Muhammad Ali. On this night, though, Jerry's experience and Lyle's lack of it was clearly evident. Jerry took Ron to counterpunching school and handed Lyle his first defeat.

To Ron's credit he quickly went back to the business of re-establishing himself. A win and a draw against Greg Peralta; knockouts over Jose Luis Garcia, Jurgen Blin, and Boone Kirkman; two decision wins over Larry Middleton; twelve round verdicts over rugged Oscar Bonavena and former champion Jimmy Ellis put Lyle back in the title picture. His only loss during this time was a decision setback against slick boxing Jimmy Young.

Ron finally challenged The Greatest for the world's championship Ali regained the year before when he "rope-a-doped" George Foreman. Ali tried to use that same tactic against Lyle, but Ron would have none of it. Forcing Ali to box at ring center, Ron was able to trade with Ali in a very slow-paced bout. In round eleven Ali stunned Lyle and trapped him in a corner. Ali's follow-up barrage had Ron out on his feet when the referee intervened. Lyle would never get another shot at the title.

The brawl with Foreman was a classic for the ages. It pitted two of the biggest, strongest men to ever lace up boxing gloves, teeing off on each other with no regard for defense. It was a brutal war of attrition. Although Lyle lost, he probably gained more fans in defeat than in all of his previous victories. The bout with Shavers was another rock 'em, sock 'em affair. This time Lyle got off the canvas to outlast Earnie and score a devastating knockout.

The loss to Foreman and another decision loss to the clever Jimmy Young forced Ron to rally toward another title shot. Hard-fought decision wins over Joe Bugner, Stan Ward and Scott LeDoux put him in the mix again, but a surprising second round kayo loss to unheralded Lynn Ball finally dropped Lyle from contention. In his last significant bout, Gerry Cooney halted him in one round. Ron Lyle made a brief comeback years later, but it was in the 70s that he made his mark.

It's too bad Lyle didn't hook up with Ken Norton when both were in their prime. Norton is ranked

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22nd in the Ring's top 50, but in my opinion Lyle would have taken him out. As far as dream matches go, how about Lyle vs. Cleveland Williams, or Lyle vs. Mike Weaver? Or maybe a battle of ex-cons with Lyle squaring off against Sonny Liston?

Now those would be some interesting match-ups.