What would drive anyone to take up a career in boxing?

Others forms of "work" do not come close to the risk/reward of being a professional prizefighter. In most every case the financial reward doesn't come close to the risk involved. Literally putting life and limb on the line is a gamble few can make, yet boxers do this every time they climb through the ropes.

The only conceivable reason for a boxer to take to the ring is simple - the love of the sport. Sure, dreams of being the next great thing run through the mind of many beginning fighters, but after dreams quickly fade most of them still find themselves working the heavy bag and hitting the mitts.

Once boxing is in your blood not even a transfusion can get it out. You are who you are: a boxer.

No other sport is as complex as the sweet science and that only fuels the appeal. Pure strength will get a fighter close. Speed and fast hands will get a boxer near the top. Mental toughness can take a boxer over the edge, or prevent one from climbing the mountain of success. Will, determination, heart and all those qualities you cannot feel, see or acquire are essentials. When you put all of those together it still does not ensure success. A boxer can't pass the ball to a teammate; it's all in his two hands.

One-on-one combat of the fistic variety is also unforgiving. One false step and fighter can be separated from his senses. A mental lapse and he is caught in the fire without an escape. With just a slight hesitation a boxer may be on the wrong end of a fight-ending blow. Being tired can cause a fighter to lazily pull back the jab, which translates into eating a heavy counter bomb. Once a fighter is in the ring, mistakes can become terminal. One can't look over their shoulder to the corner and be told what to do in mid-battle. It has to be figured out and learned in the heat of the moment. Often the hard way.

With families to feed and futures to build, boxers are alone once the bell rings but split their efforts after the battle is done. Promoters, trainers, cut men and managers all get a piece of the pie and split up what the boxer has earned by risking his health by coming out at the ring of a bell. Knowing this, the boxer does it between 30-50 times in a career. The risk is entirely assumed by the fighter, yet the rewards are split.

I have dabbled in amateur boxing for the health benefits and competition, which means I've been hit - but never as hard any professional fighter has. And that is a scary thought.

In my amateur debut, the first punch thrown was a thing of beauty - from his point of view. After pumping my jab out a few times to measure the distance and get my ring legs under me, I caught his heavy right hand perfectly . . . with my face. The blow broke my nose, but fighting in

Central America meant the rules were open to interpretation, and I was allowed to continue. Some luck that was. No, I didn't storm back with the beat of 'The Eye of The Tiger' pumping through my veins, but I did manage to salvage a four-round draw.

What I was fortunate to experience first hand - depending on how you look at it - was the effects of a variety of shots and how they impacted me. Body shots, for example, have different effects on different people. For me I have felt the sting of a perfectly placed body shot and been left paralyzed against the ropes because of it. The legs can freeze - it will literally take your breath away - and numb the senses. Different people react differently, but none of it is good.

Getting caught clean to the head is something else. When people say the lights go out – they literally can, even for a split second. It just goes black for a millisecond or two. The fighters who have to drain their bodies to make imposed weight limits risk brain damage or worse from blows to the head. They have to lose weight in order to collect a check and feed the family, so they often sweat out water by making extended, and sometimes repeated, trips to the sauna.

Water is important because it acts as an 'air bag' for the brain, cushioning it from blows. When fighters cut down and dry out to make weight they lose that water and thin that cushioning layer.

Think of the brain as being suspended in the cranium with a thin wall of liquid known as 'spinal fluid' cushioning it and keeping the brain suspended. Spinal fluid contains water and so 'drying out' thins the cushion between the brain and the cranium. A concussion is a temporary disturbance of the brain that is caused by the brain crashing into the cranium causing neurological damage. The trauma is caused by a blow to the head – in this case manifested by an opponent's gloved fist. In some cases, such as the recent Joe Mesi case, it can also result in internal bleeding.

A concussion can sometimes be considered getting off easy. Many fights have ended with stunning knockouts which look like they could be life threatening. Instead, it is usually the bouts that go the longer distances that result in the most damaging neurological side effects. This is a result of the steady volume of punches a fighter absorbs combined with a thinning layer of spinal fluid caused by dehydration as the bout progresses.

Death, unfortunately, is a reality in the ring. Fighters die doing something they love while trying to support people they love. There are worse ways to go, and the timing is never appropriate, but when it happens to a boxer it is nothing short of a tragedy. Knowing the risks that exist each time they make their way into the ring, fighters do it anyway.

In battles of the sweet science there is no teammate to blame and no secondary person who can let the boxer down. Win or lose, the fighter bears the burden of victory or defeat.

There isn't anything quite like it, and once it's in you, you can't shake it.

For better or worse.