

Gerald McClellan: A Fallen Warrior In Need of Forgiveness and Support

Written by Jake Donovan

Thursday, 24 February 2005 18:00

Those who hold boxing near and dear to their hearts will be the first to tell you that the sport is like no other. It requires the most dedication, is the most physically demanding, and more often than people would like to believe it is also the least rewarding.

You don't believe me? Well, don't take my word for it. Just ask any non "A-list" fighter to break down their purses, and your jaw would drop in learning how little they wind up taking home once everyone else gets a piece of the pie. Ask a fighter the difference in fan base before and after a single loss. Ask any retired fighter how many people give a damn about what goes in their life after boxing, especially those who struggle to make ends meet once they are forced to hang up the gloves.

The truth is that most people won't bother to ask. Many will ignore such situations altogether, as if pretending that all is well will make things better. Others choose to reflect on the past and dare suggest how said fighter wound up in that predicament. Rather than look to make a difference, they walk away and chalk up the misfortunes to a boomerang effect – what goes around comes around is the cliché that gets tossed around.

The latter has become the mindset that all too many have in regards to former middleweight champion Gerald McClellan.

For the past ten years – to the day, by the time this article goes to print – the "G-Man" has been forced to cope not only with a life after boxing, but with the fact that he will spend the rest of life in another person's care. Such are the results from his brutal slugfest with then WBC super middleweight champion Nigel Benn, where McClellan suffered a blood clot on the brain which not only forced him into submission midway through the tenth round, but also resulted in Gerald slipping into a coma for the next eleven days.

If not for the superior work of the medical staff on hand at the London Arena that night, we would be discussing the ten year "anniversary" of McClellan's death. Knowing that –in McClellan's own words to his corner midway through the fight – "something isn't right tonight," the medical staff was put on alert and top doctors who happened to be watching the fight dropped their plans and made sure to head for the hospital at the drop of a dime.

The dime turned out to be McClellan himself, who dropped to the canvas three times in less than two minutes. The first two times were the result of voluntary knockdowns, as McClellan twice took a knee in no longer being able to cope with the blood clot developing in his brain. Once referee Alfred Asaro waved the fight off, Gerald then made his way back to his corner, where rather than sitting on a stool, he dramatically slumped to the canvas, again indicating to anyone that would listen that something was not right.

Ten years later, something is still not right.

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What's not right is that a man who is in need of our attention and concern is instead ignored or, worse, vilified for past sins. Those who fell in love with the passionate rage for which he conducted his business in the ring now choose to reflect on the merciless nature in which he treated his fighting pit bulls, especially the ones that lost. Those who were along for the ride for each and every victory, especially the fourteen straight knockouts he racked up prior to the Benn fight, have all but disappeared with the exception of a few. Very few.

Two of the few who were there from the beginning and have now become the last ones standing are his sisters, Lisa and Sandra. A third sister, Stacey, stuck around for as long as possible, but eventually gave in to the overwhelming demand required to now care for Gerald, who only recently has been able to move around without the assistance of a wheelchair. Now it is down to Lisa and Sandra, who are forced to care for their brother around the clock 365 days a year.

For Lisa and Sandra, life is not limited to caring for Gerald, even though the time needed for such care is in itself a full time job and then some. They also have to find time to manage their own lives and families. Neither has asked for much in the past decade - simply for those involved in Gerald's life when he was on top to be around in his time of need. They ask for fighters to not just talk about helping Gerald, but to follow through and let their actions speak louder than their words. Finally, they ask that Gerald is remembered not for the way he conducted his life outside of the ring, but for the present physical state he is in and will remain as a result of what transpired in the ring, and not as an afterthought.

Plenty of fans have in fact reached out to the McClellan family, for which they are truly grateful. For those who refuse to feel pity for the man, I say put your pride aside and imagine for a second what it is like to be Lisa McClellan. Picture raising a family and preparing your oldest child for college. Picture working full-time, going to school to further yourself in life, and then coming home to complete your day. Quite taxing, isn't it? Most would be ready for bedtime after such an agenda, and that would be with the assistance of a spouse. For Lisa, the day is merely halfway done, sans assistance and often without sleep as well, as the rest of the time is spent taking care of her brother.

So for those who still feel the need to seek excuses in turning a blind eye to a tragedy that has brought a family to financial distress, think of how forgiving other industries are in honoring people far less noble than Gerald. In Hollywood, a film worthy of Academy Award consideration is grounds for bestowing praise and forgiveness upon a director who, if he returns to this country will be sent to prison for having sex with a 13-year-old girl. In basketball, a player can cheat on his wife with hundreds of women, yet gain national sympathy and forgiveness when it is announced that he tested HIV-positive. In football, a man can drop a dime on his friends to avoid a murder rap, yet have the media turn the other cheek in glorifying his level of intensity on the playing field.

But in boxing, where fighters turn to the ring for salvation, a fallen fighter is not worthy of our time or forgiveness. It was not enough that he risked his life every time he stepped into the ring. It was not enough that he gave fans their money's worth in knocking out one contender after the next. Now it is not enough that his family has been torn apart by the tragedies which he suffered

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in the ring, or that Gerald will never see again. It is not enough that he will require someone else's assistance to carry out the simplest of tasks for the rest of his life.

Fortunately, there are enough people left, albeit an ever decreasing number through the years, who believe that it is not a reason that he should be forgotten, despised or bypassed for more recent events. He was a boxing warrior, who offered everything – almost including his own life – to please the fans. He deserves a better fate than to be an afterthought.

Until a concrete boxing union, one with enough teeth to seriously make a mark in the boxing industry is formed to help offset such medical costs, the McClellan family is forced to foot the bill – approximately \$70,000 per year – on their own, in addition to finding ways to maintain their own lives. How fans can offer their help to the family is by contributing to the Gerald McClellan Trust Fund. For those that are unaware, or have forgotten, donations can be made to:

Gerald McClellan Trust
C/O Fifth Third Bank
PO Box 120
Freeport, IL 61032

You can also contribute online, by visiting the Gerald McClellan website at www.geraldmcclellan.com. All supporters who pledge to help Gerald McClellan by donating \$50 or more will receive a magnificent limited edition art print of Gerald in his prime, painted by Hall of Fame artist Richard T. Slone.