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Monday, 11 July 2005 19:00

Following in the footsteps of an all-time great is both complex and difficult. Typically, when a son follows in the footsteps of a great fighter, the ambivalence of high hopes and cynicism comes from the boxing establishment and fans alike. Whether it's Joe and Marvis Frazier, the Chavezes, the Camachos, or the Durans, it's difficult no matter how you cut it. In fact, fellow Sweet Science writer Robert Cassidy Jr. beautifully explained why he didn't pursue a boxing career in the footsteps of his father, former contender "Irish" Bobby Cassidy, in his recent article, "Shadow Boxing with Dad." Boxing is a tough business, and family ties often exacerbate the inherent adversity a young fighter faces while carving his own path.

Aaron Pryor is considered by many boxing experts to be the best junior welterweight champion in boxing history. I was lucky enough to interview Aaron last year in Cincinnati. At the time of the interview, he informed me that both of his sons, Stephan and Aaron Jr., were boxers, but he wanted to step away from training them for various reasons. When he told me that he didn't want to train his sons, I smiled. I thought it was a smart move considering the history of father and son relationships in our sport. Sometimes the combination works, but usually it doesn't work as smoothly as everyone would like.

Less than one week ago, I sat down with Stephan Pryor in a downtown Cincinnati office to discuss his career. Stephan had a solid amateur background, and is officially 8-1 as a pro. Many people forget that Aaron faced managerial and promotional difficulties early in his career. A lot of contenders didn't want to fight him, and he had to actually step up in weight for his title shot against Antonio Cervantes in 1980.

Stephan's problems are both similar and different. Unlike Aaron, Stephan is unranked. Similarly, he's experienced promotional and managerial issues in moving his career forward. Luckily, Stephan has found a new promoter in Mike Acri, and will be restarting his career soon. Stephan is a 29-year-old middleweight, and among other notable fighters, he has sparred with Ricardo Mayorga and Kelly Pavlik. He appeared to be fit and about ten pounds heavier than the middleweight limit when we met. Stephan has definitive goals and a clear focus on what he wants to accomplish for the remainder of his boxing career, and also has a keen eye on what he wants to do when his career is over.

Here is my interview with Stephan Pryor.

TSS: When did you first start thinking about becoming a boxer?

Stephan Pryor: Well, I think 1990. It looked easy from the outside looking in. I had a lot of street fights, so I wanted to get paid in some type of way. I wanted some sort of reward; a trophy or something to be doing what I'm doing to be happy with what I was doing.

TSS: When you first started in the gym, who was training you? Describe your first gym experiences. How old were you?

Stephan Pryor: I was about 15 years old. When I first went to the gym, it was Jackie Shropshire and Billy Joiner at the Emmanuel Community Center downtown. My father trained at that gym, too.

TSS: Did your Dad discourage that, or was he neutral, or was he positive about you boxing?

Stephan Pryor: Well, it was my mother. She was for the sport. She was always telling me to go knock 'em out. Basically, I've been doing it ever since.

TSS: What was your amateur record, and what weight did you fight at?

Stephan Pryor: I lost six fights. I had like 36 fights. I fought at 156. I started in 1996-97. I stopped in 2000.

TSS: Outside of your father, which fighters did you like to watch growing up? Is there any particular fighter you patterned yourself after?

Stephan Pryor: Hagler.

TSS: As you transitioned from the amateurs to the pros, how was it different? Training, management team, competition, etc.?

Stephan Pryor: Well, you get paid (laughing)! It's a lot different than getting trophies. Trophies get dust. In terms of management and promotions, it's way different. In the amateurs, they make sure you have room and board and things like that. It's different now because I'm lacking a manager, but promotion-wise, I'm with Mike Acri. Things are running very smoothly now, but financial-wise I'm still up in the attic right now trying to get the spider webs down.

TSS: When I interviewed your father last year, he indicated that he preferred to step away from training both you and Aaron Jr. To be honest, I think it's a smart move because historically father and son combinations in boxing are tough. Fathers and sons can have a great relationship outside of boxing, but in boxing the relationship is more difficult and complex. Tommy Ayers is training you now. Tommy was a top welterweight contender in the 1980s. He was a good fighter. He was 38-4 with 32 knockouts. He fought some excellent fighters. He was a tremendous puncher. What are you learning from Tommy in the gym now?

Stephan Pryor: Eye coordination and speed. Speed will come with the power. Basically eye coordination, speed, and power. How to throw a punch. Make sure the punch is on the right platform. When you throw the punch, to throw it the correct way. He was a good puncher, a power puncher. He's showing me some pointers. He showed me his way. I know how to punch, but he showed me how to correctly throw the punch.

TSS: Gives us a daily look at your training regimen now, and how does it compare to your training as an amateur?

Stephan Pryor: Well, I eat different. No more pizza (laughing). It's way different now. It's a

mental thing.

TSS: You've compiled a pro record of 8-1 (5 knockouts), and have been inactive for about one year. Please detail some of the difficulties you've experienced in moving your career forward.

Stephan Pryor: First, the one loss came back in 1992. I was underage. I went down to Lexington, Kentucky. We had a promoter named Richie. He wasn't really a promoter. He was one of these slumlord promoters. They grab a group of kids from the streets and see if they want to make some money.

Basically, my father was on drugs at the time. I said I knew how to fight, and I wanted to make some money. They said it was going to be a toughman fight, and they said I was going to wear the protective gear on my head. I understand what they said about the headgear. They said I wouldn't have to worry about anything, and I would get paid. So, I said okay, cool. They tricked me. I wound up fighting a guy named Nate Jackson out of Lexington. In the first round, I come out, and I'm fighting a heavyweight. I wasn't a heavyweight. I was a light heavyweight. I was fighting him and winning the round. I came back to the corner, and they put beer in my mouth. They weren't checking bottles and water back then. I don't know why. So I go out in the second round, and my mouth is dry. I felt like I had sand in my mouth. I never had sand in my mouth, but you know what I'm talking about. It was dry. So I went on one knee, and he can have this. I knew had to learn how to start fighting.

So after that, I asked my father to start training me. Basically, he got off drugs and he started training me. Everything went well after that. Remember, he started training me as an amateur. I won the Regional Golden Gloves here in Cincinnati. That was a pro fight they sanctioned me in, and I went back amateur, and stayed amateur for four or five years. Then I turned pro again in 2000. It's like going to the NBA and then going to college and back to the NBA. Basically that's what happened with my only pro loss. I don't let that distract me or discourage me. I let that be my first and only loss to learn from.

In moving forward, I need the right fights. I'm doing that with Mike Acri, and it's no problem. He's an A+ guy there. Management-wise, though, it's a day-by-day struggle in the area I'm from. Basically, right now just focus on the fights. I'm going to be fighting in Pittsburgh at Heinz Field on August 6. Once I win this fight, I want to keep moving. If they could get me a fight tomorrow, I'd fight.

TSS: If there was one fighter you'd like to face right now, who would that be and why?

Stephan Pryor: First, I wanted to fight Camacho Sr., and I had Camacho Jr. on my mind, too. The reason why I had them on my mind first is because it would be a good draw. As a matter of fact, I was down at Warrior's Gym in Hollywood, Florida where Camacho Sr. was training. Zab Judah flew me in. I was down there training with Zab. I wanted to fight Camacho. So, I actually prompted him, said I wanted to fight him. He got out of the ring and pushed me. So we had an altercation. He pushed me and I pushed him. He apologized to me, though. After that, it died down.

Now I see Thomas Hearns' son fighting, Ronald Hearns! He's 6-0. My father beat Tommy Hearns in the amateurs without headgear. Why not me and his son fight in two or three more fights? That would be a good draw. We have something called the past, and this is now. Coming to an arena near you. *I'D LOVE TO FIGHT HIM!*

TSS: In any profession, it's good to have short-term and long-term goals. Specifically, what are your short-term goals (1 year) and your long-term goals (3-5 years)?

Stephan Pryor: I'm glad you asked that question because at home I wrote a diagram. Where I'm at now, and where I want to be. I'm glad you said that. I say I'd like to have four more fights before the year is up. Next year, around this time, I'd like to fight for some sort of title. There's so many belts out there, give me one of those belts. My pants are coming down there's so many belts. Basically, that's my goal right now. In three years, if things work out well in boxing, it's always good to have something on the side. I'd like to be a writer like you. I'd like to learn the boxing game interviewing fighters. You have to have some type of goal and some other expectation on what to do in life besides boxing, because boxing isn't guaranteed to be around forever. I'm starting to do a little bit of that for www.8ballmag.com .

(Author's note: 8 Ball Magazine is an "adult" magazine. It is, however, mostly a social commentary and civil rights magazine. Of the 80 pages of the edition I saw, a total of about 10 nude pictures of women were featured. Stephan is working with the CEO, Anthony Baltimore, to build a boxing section of the magazine. Anthony was present during the course of our interview. He has an excellent knowledge of the sport. We had an extended dialogue on the state of the game, recent fights, and the upcoming Hopkins-Taylor bout before the interview with Stephan started.)

TSS: How would you describe your style? A boxer? A puncher? A boxer/puncher?

Stephan Pryor: I'm a puncher, and then a boxer. I can box, but I can really hurt you. Once I got you hurt, I'm a good finisher. I looked at my father's DVDs. When he got you hurt, he was a good finisher in the business. I looked at some of his fights, and showed me some of the styles he used. Sometimes when I'm fighting, and I look at the film, I'm doing some of the stuff he used to do. Basically, I'm a puncher. If I hit you, it's going to make you weary.

TSS: Considering that you're a puncher first and a boxer second, is Tommy Ayers trying to round out your style to get you to box more?

Stephan Pryor: Basically, the focus is punching. Let's bring the punching back. We've got little cobwebs on it right now; little rust on it right now. We're putting a little oil in the joints now, and everything's following smoothly now.

TSS: We've talked about gym work, and some of the technical things you're working on with Tommy. In terms of following in your father's footsteps, anytime you follow in someone's footsteps, there are some positive things and some negative things. Is that something you actually think about? How do you view that? In fact, let's put it in a hard way. Some guys like to gain a reputation in the gym. They know you're Aaron Pryor's son. Have some guys called you

out in the gym? That's the negative part. How is following in your father's foot steps positive and negative?

Stephan Pryor: Well, I never really had guys talk like that. I'm from the streets. They know. In terms of my father, I try to follow his role of success, and not the negative ways. What he did in the past, everyone makes mistakes. Not just in boxing. Everyone makes mistakes. I learn off of the experience, and not just my father. I learn from Tommy Ayers. Not just Tommy Ayers, but I also learned from Ricardo Williams. I learn off of these guys. I'm a humble guy. I make mistakes, and I correct my mistakes. I'm not perfect, either. Basically, there are negative things in life and in the game. They're always going to find something from way back in the past to pull you down. I don't care what people say about me, or what they think about me. They can't judge me; they should judge themselves. For the haters, their hate just motivates me. That's all. I don't worry about that.

TSS: In other words, you don't feel the pressure?

Stephan Pryor: No. I've been through a lot of pressure … and pain (laughing).

TSS: You are your own man.

Stephan Pryor: Right.

TSS: Anything you'd like to add?

Stephan Pryor: Well, two or three more fights and let's fight Ronald Hearns. Ronald Hearns. I'm going to keep saying that. RONALD HEARNS! I want to be on the right path. I'm working with my man Anthony with 8 Ball Magazine on ranking fighters. I'll be putting in my picks for the Top 20 fighters. We'll interview fighters on the magazine each month. I've talked to Diego Corrales. He's real cool. I talked to Lamon Brewster. I might interview all these guys on a phone conversation or go see them. Doing something different after boxing is over. I like to talk a lot. I'd like to help with promotions.

(Author's Note: After the interview was over, I asked some additional questions about other Cincinnati-based boxers. Cincinnati placed two fighters on the 2004 Olympic Team: Ron Siler and Rau'Shee Warren. Stephan informed me that Ron is scheduled to fight in the near future, but he needs a promoter right now. Stephan told me that Rau'Shee will be staying in the amateur ranks. I'll be following up with Stephan in the gym in a few weeks, and will keep fans posted on his progress when he fights in Pittsburgh on August 6.)