

## Monte Barrett Chases The Dream

Written by Bill Knight  
Sunday, 07 August 2005 19:00

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Fighters are dreamers.

It comes with the territory, standard issue along with the trunks, shoes and hand wraps.

And, how can they not be dreamers? They train long, solitary, sweat-filled hours to put themselves alone in a ring with a man looking to remove their head from their neck. They dream of tomorrow, they dream of that next big break, they dream of that special feeling when someone slips a world title belt around their waist.

Monte Barrett is one of those dream chasers.

Barrett, at 34, will try to make an enormous step in his rather unheralded career when he steps through the ropes in the United Center on Aug. 13, hoping, believing — dreaming — that Chicago will be home to his greatest triumph yet. Hasim Rahman has his own dreams. And they include Barrett only as a steppingstone, a supporting character in his own dream.

Barrett, like so many fighters, has worked his way through a hardscrabble life to reach this moment.

“I’ve made it through bankruptcy, repossessions, divorce, separation from my kids, no money, my kids with holes in their sneakers, sharing chicken McNuggets, losing \$70,000 in the stock market. All that didn’t break me. Do you think Hasim Rahman has a chance?”

So many of the dreamers have their limitations. They don’t have the skill or they don’t have the resolve ... maybe their dreams are not steel-laden. Those dreams evaporate into the ring air during the hardest of times.

Barrett has some ability. He has made it this far, piecing together a very good 31-3 record, with 17 knockouts. He has endured, always working somewhere outside the radar. Only partially joking, his trainer Harold Knight said, “We will use that as fuel for the fire. Monte has always been the Rodney Dangerfield of boxing; no respect.”

Barrett and the 32-year-old Rahman are friends and they did not have to make this fight. It is for the WBC Interim world title, whatever that is. Actually, what it is is that one of these men will get a world title belt and then have to defend it against Vitali Klitschko, when he gets healthy. But a world title belt by any other name is still a dream come true. Barrett could have waited, bided his time and gone center ring with Chris Byrd.

“I felt like I was in a win-win situation,” Barrett said. “I can’t go wrong. Two tough guys. But you’ve got a puncher who can’t box (Klitschko) and a boxer who can’t punch (Byrd).”

Barrett has been training in solitude in the Poconos, using the mountains and the wilderness to

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crystallize his dreams. He has been working hard for seven weeks, running in the mountains early in the morning, training in the ring in the afternoons and lifting weights at night ... dream chasing with a vengeance.

“Everybody knows Monte is an animal when it comes to training,” Knight said. “Basically, I’ve had to slow him down. He’s got over 80 rounds sparring, he’s getting in the mountains at 6 o’clock in the morning and running with the deer. He’s looking excellent. My job’s gotten harder the last couple of weeks, just slowing him down. This guy was ready to fight two weeks ago.”

Soon, on an August night in Chicago, the two friends will stage a bangfest.

“Rock and I are friends,” Barrett said. “We’re real good friends. But we’re in a blood sport business. We just have a lot of respect for each other, inside the ring and outside of the ring. I was good friends with Dominick Guinn and I took his head off. Like I said, at the end of the day, we’re in a blood sport business. I’m so focused on this fight, it’s not even funny.”

“This fight is the No. 1 fight in my career,” Barrett said. “The reason why is every fight I have fought was the number one thing in my life at that time. You can look past nobody. There is no tomorrow when you step into that ring. In boxing, we live for the moment. THE moment.”

Dreaming is a serious business in the sweet science. To dream big, you must train big ... and, ultimately, you must win big.

“Monte is right there,” Knight said. “His best is yet to come. His focus, his intelligence with his athleticism and his will to win and his belief in God and hard work, man ... you couldn’t ask for any more. He’s going to shock the world on Aug. 13. Monte’s M. O. is to swing for the fences, especially when he gets hurt or when he gets hit. We’re putting everything together, shortening up his punches. He’s running 5-7 miles a day, two or three workouts a day. He’s doing everything you could ask.”

And Barrett said, “I love training in the Poconos. I like the wilderness. I like the fresh air. I like the cold. I like coming away in my own zone, being away from everybody. I’m in shape to go 15 hard rounds. I’m so focused I could fight all day long. I’m going to be on my A-plus game.”

A dreamer’s scheme, but a necessary one for any fighter. You have to believe.

Monte Barrett has been through some hard times, almost certainly having a mental fight at times to keep those dreams alive. But they are alive. He has five children, ages one to 12 — four girls and a boy. He keeps them away from his business. But they know. Dreams, after all, can spill over.

Barrett said, “My kids will not see this fight. But they know. They say, Daddy, you’ve got to win this fight because we can’t go to school if you lose.”

Barrett, like all dreamers, believes it is his destiny to win this fight, to win this belt. It would be the stuff of dreams. He said he will make between \$250,000 and \$350,000 for this fight. Of

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course, a win could set up an even bigger payday. Heady stuff for even the best of dreamers.

But Barrett had another win recently, one that got him a much smaller purse. "I won on The Price is Right," he said. "I won about \$6,000 on The Price is Right. And, on Aug. 13, my price will be right."

And the dreams live on, flourishing inside hard working men ... inside men trying so hard, trying with every ounce of their sweat and blood to make those dreams come true. Monte Barrett will get a serious dream check on Aug. 13.