

The Fight Manager

Written by Michael Olajide
Thursday, 27 April 2006 19:00

From my first unassisted breath outside my mother's womb, I am now 15 years retired and to this very day boxing remains an integral part of my life... even in ways I would rather not acknowledge... the consistent stumbling because of a loss of depth perception... The double vision from the orbital fracture... the loss of balance from the overhand rights and left hooks behind the ear... Conversely, there's the great cardiovascular health I still maintain from teaching boxing and its conditioning at my own gym... The boxing fans I enjoy and the camaraderie of the ex-fighters I run into at events or fights, the sweet memories when I run across an old press clipping... the list goes on. I have learned in life to take the good with the bad... roll with the punches... it ain't if you get knocked down, it's "did you stay down?"

Like many boxers, I grew up without my father in my life for a major part of my formative years. It was only when I decided to box that we got to know one another... but when boxing is in your blood – it is down to the core – a defining part of you. And it was in my father so it had to be in me, how could it not?

Ultimately I choose to believe boxing has been good to me, it is the people in it that have made certain experiences ugly. Kind of like a religion, which is intended to be good but certain individuals that practice said religion do immoral things, giving it a bad name.

So what do you do with this mistress that loves you and allows you... no, excuse me, she **MAGNIFIES** the empowerment that the physical human being craves... the depth of intoxication is bottomless... you are never fulfilled.

Here's the scenario, you are feeling like the best **FIGHTER** in the world... then one evening in a Las Vegas desert, or amidst a throbbing mass of humanity in Madison Square Garden, she leaves you to place herself comfortably on the lap of another man sitting diagonally across from you on a wooden stool. She once loved you, but you have lost your reason and now she watches you leaving years and beads of your life as drips of dried blood mingle with some other poor dreamers... your elixir sucked into an old canvas and carelessly trampled on, smudged... as yellow sweat on a once white towel... shot neurons turn off forever and train tracks cover your eyebrows. You can't blame her, you would leave a loser like yourself if you could leave yourself... or if you believed yourself a loser. Still, you wonder where you went wrong... every fighter does. No matter the monetary success, no fighter escapes defeat... as sure as no one lives forever.

As a fighter, you cannot trust yourself to make the right decision for yourself... you cannot see the forest for the trees... and fighters are not unlike dogs bred to fight... even with a broken jaw the will to fight never leaves, you silently resign yourself to die and so the process begins... birth in reverse.

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But wait, do I see a light? There are a few individuals in the sport one would think could effect positive change for the boxer... (again, most boxers do not come from remotely privileged backgrounds, so you'd think the responsibility of making a sizeable amount of cash and putting it away for the boxer, would lay with someone other than the boxer) and make the experience as humane as thrashing someone's head can possibly be and one of those individuals are known as the fight manager; the man most responsible for a fighter's financial well-being.

Some fighters finish boxing and they would rather refer to their managers as the Pug Pimp. Ever notice that whenever they have a part in a movie that calls for a gallant boxer, said boxer never has a manager because no one really ever has anything noble to say about them. Who was Rocky's manager? Jon Voigt in The Champ? The truth is, like fighters, many are pimps, many are suckers.

I would not be the first one to tell you that a manager is the most relevant/irrelevant individual in the sport; so essential to the fighter and irrelevant to the fan. The best ones have the intelligence and instinct to bring the least talented individuals to the forefront and secure his well being/finances... he also can leave a fighter destitute and destroyed... (Not that he destroyed what he helped build, but maybe he didn't have the influence to stop him from his cascading fall) penniless and without pride... (Not that he took his pride – that left before the fall.) You may say ultimately that it is the fighter's responsibility, and I will agree, BUT any manager that can turn their back to a former fighter of theirs... well, they may be lacking a certain quality that you like in your humans, like compassion. After all, the fighter did help cement the manager's position... (Fighter, manager and trainer are the ultimate epitome of symbiosis.) Every time he stepped in the ring, the manager got paid whether the fighter dies or not. As sure as the bell rings, they were a rung up the ladder of success. Yet I wouldn't be human if I didn't have the urge to contradict myself... If someone is abusing himself and as a manager you do not have the power to stop them, what can you do but leave them? And the taste of the experience with some fighters can be so repugnant, how could one allow them back into your life, no matter how many mea culpas?

I went through my whole boxing career without knowing what the true function of a manager should do when he has a fighter... and I didn't consider myself exactly stupid... But ignorant in that I lacked knowledge, I didn't seek it out, nor was it offered to me. This man is generally getting a third of your purse... this man is someone whom you entrust your very financial (and therefore physical) substance to. Only the former was I really aware of... a third of your purse. Ten percent off the top goes to your trainer. Training expenses are how you negotiate them with a promoter, but either way, your salary is capped. You don't agree upon your purse and once that is done turn around and say, OK, now I have to get training money... that is factored in by the promoter at the top of negotiations.

Is the manager merely a man in the know who brings their fighter to the forefront and allows him to do what he wants? Or is he a guru of sorts? An individual who takes care of their fighter more than how they would a family member... Like the fighter were him, himself... Generally humans love nothing over themselves so that should tell us that it is impossible for a manager to love a fighter more than he loves himself.

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Should he be a mentor that leads a fighter to glory, despite the aggravation of a thankless fighter? Should managers be limited to the number of fighters they are allowed to take care of? How could a manager truly be concerned with the health of a fighter when he has 20 other fighters that are his responsibility.

If a fighter ends his career broke, who is to blame for it?

I am by no means the worse of the stories of mismanaged boxers... two come storming to the forefront of my brain immediately... Jerry Quarry and Wilfredo Benitez, two extremely talented boxers that literally, countless numbers of times, ended up on the receiving end of a gloved fist by some tough fighters... no thought to what was being done to their brains... It sickens me to think there are probably stories that make the story of Quarry and Benitez pale in comparison, but what manager would go on record to discuss such?

In the coming weeks, I am going to try to nail down some in-depth interviews with managers that many of you would be familiar with... I am also going to search for a few that you may not know... As well as a couple just entering the game. My goal is to discover the other side of the ropes and in finding out something I should've known when I was fighting, I hope to be able to give you a look at the inner workings of boxing from another perspective. What is the purpose of the manager in boxing and what are his responsibilities?