

Malcolm Garrett: It's a wrap

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Wednesday, 03 January 2007 19:00

LaPORTE, Ind.—Boxers have 27 reasons to wrap their hands because there are 27 very breakable bones crashing thousands of times into heavy bags, speed bags, opponents' hard heads, stomachs of deadbeat promoters – you get the drift.

Despite the thousands of impacts and 27 bones, there are quite a few less who truly know how to protect this cherished asset. By the day, the art forging rolls gauze and surgical tape into a sturdy comfortable hand womb of sorts is dying.

And for just 75 cents a day, you can sponsor a boxer's hand. Won't you help?

Melodrama and faux charity aside, there are those who believe a good hand wrap is hard to find. Malcolm Garrett isn't lamenting the increasingly lost art. It's job security.

The 60-year-old Garrett is guaranteed at least one ticket out of this northwestern Indiana town on a plane bound for Europe, with much thanks to Wilfried Sauerland. The remaining three weekends are typically domestic bookings. It's Moscow one week and Tampa, Fla., the next.

This charming lifestyle of exotic locations and comfortable paychecks – at least I'm assuming since he won't fess up – wasn't handed to Garrett. He's been paying his own way for almost 30 years in this business. Of course, that doesn't set him apart from any other second in the corner. Everybody pays their dues in blood or wiping it up in this business.

Reaching the point of contracts with major promoters required more than paying dues. It took Garrett's powers of observation, too.

"I used to watch everybody," he said. "Some guys wrap a lot better than others. You develop a technique of your own."

If Garrett's insight seems rather vanilla, it's for a purpose. Much like the great Japanese samurai sword makers, he picks and chooses with whom he shares information. He's always been a tremendous help in sharing knowledge and industry tidbits with me, but it was different when I first probed him about writing on this subject.

"Oh, I can't tell you that," he said. "I don't want to give away my secrets."

The art is shared within a fraternity of the corner quid pro quo. Joe Souza, Ace Marotta and Eddie Aliano all traded ideas and techniques with Garrett.

Fortunately, I can't identify the difference between the proper technique and a broken hand in waiting, and Garrett invited me to his rural home gym to chat and get a demonstration.

His backyard facility isn't just a ring and a variety of bags set into motion by a bell. Adjacent to

Malcolm Garrett: It's a wrap

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Wednesday, 03 January 2007 19:00

the ring is a hydraulic lift his nephew and friends use for various automotive projects.

The top floor is an apartment for fighters in camp. The day I arrived it housed young heavyweight Cerrone Fox, a 240-pounder out of Benton Harbor, Mich., who will be fighting on the Nikolay Valuev-Jameel McCline undercard late this month. He was sharing the place with featherweight Ricky Benevides, a contrary form when standing next to Fox.

Fox and Benevides both know Garrett's wrap, even if they haven't had 20 professional fights between them. They're just two in a long line stretched back to contenders such as Dwight Pratchett, who had Garrett's gauze and tape cradling his paws when he fought Julio Cesar Chavez for the WBC super featherweight title at the Riviera in Las Vegas in 1985.

Pratchett lost the bout by unanimous decision. Gauze and tape only get you so far in that brand of trading leather.

Mark that as the first of the 160-plus title fights of which Garrett watched from bloody – borderline macabre – corners of the ring. If he isn't wrapping hands, he's stopping cuts, such as the nasty gash that opened over Vitali Tsypko's eye early against Jeff Lacy; it took two rounds to take hold, but Garrett's work dammed the blood flow.

The business of stopping fights for a simple cut strikes Garrett as rather unnecessary anyway.

"Nobody's ever lost that much blood," he said. "The ringside doctors think the public doesn't want to see the blood. The truth is the public does want to see the blood."

WBA champion Valuev should be thankful Garrett had the foresight to catch the undersized stool the arena provided for his American debut in October against Monte Barrett in Chicago. The laughable seating peaked halfway up 7-foot Valuev's shin, leaving Garrett to modify a full-sized barstool from Bed Bath & Beyond.

These are the many talents of Malcolm Garrett. He had yet to give me any physical evidence for his boast of every fighter who wears one of his wraps is "hooked."

"It's got to feel right," he said. "Just like the trunks and the shoes, it all has to feel right."

Facing backward in the metal chair with my with my left hand – since I'm a southpaw – resting on the back and anticipating my first professional wrap, I caught a glimpse of Garrett's bag. Nothing special: A few rolls of gauze and tape, a couple sandwich bags, latex gloves, cotton swabs – and a trinket from the previous weekend in Russia.

As expected, the wrap was methodical, but much different than any I'd applied myself with reusable hook and loop wraps in the gym. There was a lot of squeezing and releasing the fist, but it wasn't until the final pass with tape that I didn't require prompting from Garrett.

And the wrap? It felt good. Not too tight, but certainly sturdy. I wanted to try it out, but Fox wasn't up for a few rounds unless I had a gratuity to go with it.

Malcolm Garrett: It's a wrap

Written by Jesse K. Cox

Wednesday, 03 January 2007 19:00

Possibly sensing my obscene impulse to grab my wallet from the car, Garrett seized my well-wrapped hand and snipped my hand free of its binding, saving me from walking into a severe beating.

It seems Garrett knows how to protect against broken hands and, given the chance, prevent bad decisions.