

Boxing's Darker Moments

Written by Aaron Tallent
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"All I ever heard is how some scandal is another nail in boxing's coffin. You know, this coffin's got nothing but sales."

The quote, made by Gleason's Gym owner Bruce Silverglade in 1999, begins *The Sweet Science Goes Sour: How Scandal Brought Boxing to its Knees* by Thomas Myler. Silverglade is correct. Boxing has worked hard to be called the red light district of the sporting world. In actuality, an entire book could consist of only quotes paraphrasing that very statement.

Since its inception in the 1700s, boxing has been the subject of scrutiny and often disgust. What else would one expect of a sport that in essence consists of two people getting into a squared circle and assaulting one another? The fixes, bizarre finishes, and tragic deaths have led to outcry from the public and lawmakers, who often follow their posturing with legislation banning boxing.

The scandalous events are enough to fill volumes of works. However, Myler, the boxing writer for the *Irish Independent* and the Irish correspondent for *Boxing News*, hits the highest – or lowest – moments of the sweet science's history.

He starts off with two large chapters. The first is on the control that Frankie Carbo, Frank "Blinky" Palermo, and other mobsters had over boxing in the 1940s and 1950s, while the second is on Don King's influence and other questionable dealings in the sport from the 1970s onward. While both are very informative, they both seem disjointed because Myler seems so intent on loading certain stories in the first two chapters that he breaks away from his principle subjects. Chapter two spends the half of its length discussing King, but then uses the other half to cram in three other non-related stories from the 1980s.

Following the first two chapters, Myler takes us through 11 of boxing's darker moments. The usual suspects are there. A chapter each is devoted to Jake LaMotta's dive against Billy Fox in 1947 in exchange for a middleweight title shot and Muhammad Ali's bizarre "Phantom Punch" first-round knockout of Sonny Liston in 1965, while others focus on the riot that followed Andrew Golota's disqualification loss to Riddick Bowe in 1996 and Mike Tyson's bizarre biting of Evander Holyfield's ear in 1997.

Myler, whose past books include *Sugar Ray Robinson: The Inside Story* and *Boxing's Greatest Upsets: Fights That Shook the World*, is an excellent writer and does a wonderful job of retelling some of boxing's most famous stories without making them retreads. For boxing fans, giving up writings on the Tyson ear-biting incident and the "Phantom Punch" seem like reasonable Lent resolutions. However, Myler's vast, firsthand knowledge of the sport makes it worthwhile to read these oft-told stories again.

But the stories that pack the most punch are the lesser-told stories, such as the one of Jerry Quarry. Most boxing fans who were born after 1975 know that the hard-charging, defenseless

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Quarry was one of boxing's top contenders in the era of Ali, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman, and would have easily won a championship in today's splintered heavyweight division. Most do not realize the sad turn of events that followed his days as a top contender and led to his untimely death at the age of 53 in 1999.

The author also devotes a chapter to Rocky Marciano's ninth-round stoppage of Don Cockell in 1955. All fans know that Marciano is the only heavyweight to retire undefeated, but most do not know the dirtiness of his ring tactics. Myler provides a round-by-round synopsis of "The Brockton Blockbuster's" most notorious ring performance.

There are points where I wish I could have received Myler's opinion on why some of these scandalous events took place. I would have liked to have learned Myler's opinion regarding the "Phantom Punch" or why Roberto Duran quit against Sugar Ray Leonard in 1980. Instead, Myler's ending of those chapters is similar to Robert Stack capping off one of "Unsolved Mysteries" segments.

The book was originally published in Great Britain so one must remember that when discussing weight, a stone equals 14 pounds. Also, to Americans, some phrases linking boxing locales to significant historical events, such as the Louisiana Superdome and Hurricane Katrina, will seem a bit tacked on.

While the scandals mentioned in Myler's book have caused the greatest uproar, I wished he would have also focused on the second tier events that have greatly diminished interest in the sport. One of the events covered in the first two chapters was the 1983 Billy Collins/Louis Resto match in which it was discovered that Resto and his trainer, Panama Lewis, had removed the padding from his gloves. I would have liked to have seen a chapter devoted to that bout, along with ones on the 1962 Emile Griffith/Benny Paret bout that tragically ended in Paret's death or Julio Cesar Chavez's dubious draw with Pernell Whitaker in 1993. Those events all received an overwhelming amount of criticism and silently drove many fans away from the sport. But as mentioned earlier, this is a subject on which volumes could be written and Myler does a wonderful job covering the material he has selected.