

Sugar Ray Leonard's Fantasy Boxing Camp

Written by David A. Avila

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Few people realize Sugar Ray Leonard's capacity for multi-tasking.

Aside from representing the Contender reality television series, the former welterweight, junior middleweight, middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight world champion also assists with pro fighters, raises a family and now will provide a fantasy boxing camp for adults this summer.

Where does he find the time?

"I've always worked on maintaining my boxing skills," says Leonard in that easy-going tone. "After so many years in the gym our (boxers) bodies are fine tuned machines. They need to be run."

Leonard says the athletes of today seem to exhibit a capacity to fight well past their 30s unlike in previous decades when it was very rare.

"In the 1950s you had Sugar Ray Robinson who fought into his 40s," said Leonard. "Today you have guys like Bernard Hopkins and Evander Holyfield who are still going strong. A guy like Bernard takes good care of his body and doesn't take alcohol. He's always in shape."

During his glory years Leonard displayed an innate ability to multi-task while inside the ring facing some of the most dangerous prizefighters the world has ever seen such as Tommy Hearns, Roberto Duran, Marvin Hagler and Armando Muniz.

"It was always about the challenges," Leonard says.

It's tough enough to face a man capable of tearing your head off if you make the slightest mistake. But Leonard was able to evade punches, find an opening and deliver a paralyzing punch all in the same motion.

"That's what made Leonard great," said Rick Smith, a boxing writer for a Los Angeles magazine. "Aside from the fast-twitch reflexes, his eyes were always open and looking for a flaw. If an opponent had a weakness it was over because Leonard would find it and exploit it."

Perhaps Leonard's first great confrontation came against a fighter with similar qualities in Wilfredo "Radar" Benitez of Puerto Rico. Both prizefighters were silky smooth with amazing reflexes and that ability to exchange punches and recognize immediately the other's weaknesses, as few as they were.

"It was like someone fighting his mirror image," said Smith, who attended the Las Vegas fight in 1979. "It was an advance course in championship boxing. It's where Leonard got his graduate degree."

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In that fight Leonard caught Benitez two times making a mistake and the final flaw cost the Puerto Rican his first loss and the welterweight world championship. Benitez was knocked out.

After that fight Leonard exploded internationally and became one of the most successful professional boxers in the history of the sport with several comebacks intertwined.

"I've always kept in shape so it was my physical condition and the ego that made me think I could come back," said Leonard, who was victorious against Hagler in 1987, but unsuccessful against Terry Norris in 1991 and Hector Camacho in 1997. "Norris was a very strong fighter that I should have left alone and against Camacho, I thought I could still fight. But I have no regrets."

Leonard said when he returned to the ring against Camacho he was 40 years old and still working out in the gym with his boxing regimen. It was his fitness that convinced himself that maybe there was one fight left in that boxer's body that had vanquished many an opponent.

"Every once in a while you step in to something too deep," he said. "But I also kicked some butt and won some titles."

Now 51, Leonard knows that men have egos and love challenges. They want to test themselves regardless of age. That's why he continues to multi-task.

"All guys want to know they can still fight. Guys like punching things around," says Leonard who surprisingly includes himself.

It's no surprise that Leonard can host a television show, promote fighters, juggle appearances and teach adults the finer points of boxing preparation. Multi-tasking is his forte.

For information on the Leonard's boxing fantasy camp call (760) 438-9918 or go to www.ultimatesportsfantasycamp.com

Alfonso Gomez

One of Leonard's protégé's Alfonso Gomez has been preparing for his showdown with boxing great Arturo Gatti. The fight takes place on July 14, at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City.

"Alfonso Gomez may not be the fastest or the strongest but he has a tremendous heart," said Leonard. "That is often the difference between winning and losing."

Gomez has gathered an incredible fan following since first appearing on the Contender reality television show in 2004.

"It's amazing to me and I consider myself very fortunate to have any fans," said Gomez, who has a victory over Peter Manfredo Jr. and whose last loss was to Manfredo in 2004.

The likeable boxer who now lives in Whittier finds himself not only facing one of the legends of the past 10 years, but also in a position to prove that fighters from the Contender show have

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more substance.

“They selected me because they think that Gatti can beat me,” says Gomez. “They made a mistake.”

Hatton KOs Castillo

Ricky Hatton’s one-punch fourth round knockout over Jose Luis Castillo proved two things: first that Hatton can be exciting despite the abundance of holding; and second, that Bernard Hopkin’s body shot knockout over Oscar De La Hoya that looked identical to Hatton’s last Saturday, can make you stop in your tracks.

De La Hoya’s inability to get up from that body shot several years back was replicated by Hatton against Castillo. Those shots can paralyze you. Ask anyone who’s ever suffered a blow like that and they will be quick to tell you they shockingly hurt.

One last thing: can Hatton please stop holding and hitting? Maybe that stuff goes over in England but we already have John Ruiz.

Paul Malignaggi

The Brooklyn Italian is one of the few New York fighters I’d pay to see. The biggest reason: his heart.

When he fought Miguel Cotto I saw the kid take some heavy punishment that would have taken the soul from many a fighter. But he kept rolling and actually won some rounds in the late going.

Very impressive.

Against Lovemore N’Dou it was not a surprise that he dominated. I had seen Palm Springs southpaw boxer Stevie Quinonez dominate N’Dou with his movement and counter-punching years earlier. So when Malignaggi schooled N’Dou on the finer points of boxing, it wasn’t a revelation.

Now Malignaggi is demanding a fight with Ricky Hatton. Can he beat him?

Absolutely.

Hatton can go for the big payday against Floyd Mayweather Jr. But if he wants a test in the junior welterweight division the only guy I’d like to see face the Manchester brawler is Malignaggi.

Why?

I’ll tell you why.

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Malignaggi moves enough to counter Hatton's clutch and hit tactics. Hatton did it once again without a point taken away by the inept referee Joe Cortez, who's not fair and not firm. He's absolutely flabbergasted by marquee fights.

Hatton was allowed once again to grab his opponent repeatedly after delivering a one-two punch combination for four rounds.

It's not Hatton's fault. It was the referee's.

If the British fighter attempted that tactic against fleet-footed Malignaggi he'd find himself face down from a well-timed right hand like N'Dou discovered.

Did Hatton beat a shot fighter like Malignaggi declared? Maybe.

But one thing is clear, Malignaggi will be a very, very competitive fight for Hatton.

Weekend results

Lightweight prospect John Molina hurt his opponent in the very first round and it looked like it might end. But the Texan recovered and the six-round bout turned into a firefight according to observers.

Molina, who's trained by one of the masters Ben Lira, won decisively over the remainder of the fight and took a few shots in return.

Heavyweight Jason Gavern gained retribution with a win over Damian Norris in Wilmington. It was a rematch of a fight Norris won by split-decision.

Gavern, who's a stable mate of James Toney, really wanted to shine with a victory over Norris.

Why?

Norris was knocked out by Chris "The Nightmare" Arreola, who Gavern really wants to fight.

Fights on television

Wed. ESPN2, 7 p.m., Yusef Mack (22-1-2) vs. Jose Vasquez (16-1-1).

Fri. ESPN2, 7 p.m., Emmanuel Nwodo (21-3) vs. Darnel Wilson (21-5-3).

Fri. Telefutera, 8 p.m., Juan Salgado (17-0-1) vs. Ivan Valle (25-5-1).

Sat. pay-per-view, 6 p.m., Evander Holyfield (41-8-2) vs. Lou Savarese (46-6).

Mon. Fox Sports Net, 10 p.m., Elena Reid (18-3-5) vs. Shin Hee Choi (8-1).