

Andrew Maynard: I Didn't Get To Hurt People

Written by Robert Mladinich
Saturday, 22 September 2007 19:00

After winning a gold medal at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea, light heavyweight Andrew Maynard was considered a shoo-in to become a professional champion. Several promoters passed on the opportunity to sign the two other gold medalists from the United States, Kennedy McKinney and Ray Mercer, in favor of targeting Maynard.

Although the then 24-year-old Maynard, who hailed from Laurel, Maryland, had only started boxing less than three years earlier, he was considered a better pro prospect than Olympic silver medalists Roy Jones Jr., who was robbed of the gold, and super heavyweight Riddick Bowe, who was considered a malingerer.

Maynard wound up signing with Maryland attorney Mike Trainer, who had guided Sugar Ray Leonard to mainstream superstardom and tens of millions of dollars in purses. Leonard became the integral figure in Maynard's professional development.

Although Maynard began his career with 12 straight wins, 10 by knockout, he now says that signing on with Trainer and Leonard was the biggest mistake of his life.

"They took away my style, made me into a defensive fighter," said the now 43-year-old Maynard who runs the boxing program at the Harlingen Foundation for Valley Sports in Texas.

"Instead of being a killer, they turned me into a pussycat. They wanted to make me fight like Ray, which was not my natural style. The new style stunk to high heaven. I didn't get to hurt people. I spent more time running around the ring than standing and fighting."

As an amateur, Maynard was an offensive whirlwind. Future professional light heavyweight title challenger John "Iceman" Scully was on the same elite international amateur team as Maynard in the years leading up to the Olympics.

At the Ohio State Fair national tournament in 1987, Scully beat the heavily favored Melvin Foster. Although relatively green, Scully amped himself up before and during the fight by repeating to himself that he had to fight like Maynard.

"Andrew was like a flyweight trapped in a light heavyweight's body," said Scully, who is now a respected trainer and author of a forthcoming book called "The Iceman Diaries."

"I never saw a fighter throw so many punches. He was relentless. Nobody could hold him off. I won the title by imitating his style and just letting my hands go. He overwhelmed everyone he fought."

Scully remembers seeing Maynard in one of his first televised pro fights, against durable journeyman Mike DeVito who was the first opponent to take Maynard the distance.

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"I couldn't believe it," said Scully. "He was boxing in circles. I said 'Wow, I've never seen him do that before.' I remembered him always throwing at least 100 punches a round, even as an amateur."

"It seemed like on day one of my pro career, I forgot everything I did that made me successful," added Maynard. "Ray tried to make me a mirror image of himself, but that wasn't me. He should have tried to bring out the best in me, not make me like him."

Maynard's first defeat, by seventh round TKO to Bobby Czyz, came in his 13th pro fight in June 1990.

"They had me running from him, rather than getting into a gunfight with him," said Maynard. "My head wanted to fight him, but I was acting like a boxer and I couldn't deflect his punches. I was doing everything Ray told me, and it was useless."

Maynard says that Leonard also told him to not discuss business with his wife, which he now realizes was also a big mistake. He says that she was more loyal to him and had his best interests at heart more than anyone else he met during his pro career.

Maynard, who is the proud father of three children, said that keeping secrets from his wife caused him no shortage of grief.

"My goal as a fighter was to win a title and make \$100 million, just like Ray did, for my family," said Maynard. "When I was training and fighting, I was always thinking of my family and how my success would benefit them. Ray converted me to only think of myself, which was a big mistake. He hurt me so bad, in so many ways."

After the loss to Czyz, Maynard put together six wins, including a third round stoppage of former champion Matthew Saad Muhammad, before being stopped himself by Frank Tate, a 1984 Olympian, in 11 rounds in New York in January 1992.

After that the losses came with much more frequency. Maynard was stopped by, among others, Anacleto Wamba, Egerton Marcus, Thomas Hearns, Sergei Kobozev, Torsten May, and Brian Nielsen before retiring in 2000 with a disappointing record of 26-13-1 (21 KOs).

"I lost my fire," said Maynard. "I was going to be the best fighter in the world, throw 400 punches a round and land 398 of them. Instead, I lost my family, I lost millions of fans, and I never made any money."

Although Maynard seems to have legitimate reasons to be angry, he still has an outward zest for life that is downright infectious. He refuses to wallow in his perceived victimization and still uses his verbal catch phrase, "Yeah, baby," with the same enthusiasm he did more than 20 years ago.

Whether or not he is using it to camouflage a wounded heart is anyone's guess.

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"We are thrilled to have Andrew on our team," said Alex Vidal, the executive director of the Harlingen Foundation for Valley Sports, who was responsible for recruiting Maynard into the program.

"His verbal trademark is 'Yeah, baby,' but he brings so much more to the program than his enthusiasm and love for the kids. Since he took over the program, enrollment has increased steadily and more kids are staying with the program.

"We attribute that to Andrew's participation," he continued. "He has an engaging personality and is very approachable, he focuses on safety but is aggressive in training, and he has a great personal history. He won a gold medal, so that makes him a part of history. The community loves and respects him."

Whatever success Maynard enjoyed at one time did not come without a high price being paid. He grew up a middle child, with three older sisters and a younger and older brother. His sisters, he said, use to beat him up on a regular basis.

"I was in the middle, so I was the odd man out," said Maynard. "I couldn't hang with the little brother or the big brother."

His late father was an over-the-road truck driver who constantly told his children that nothing was more important in life than the love and support of one's family. What the father didn't realize was that his wife, the stepmother to his children, was molesting Maynard from the time he was a pre-pubescent.

"She would beat me in the afternoon, and then wake me up late a night to apologize," said Maynard, who explained that her form of apologizing was to engage in sex.

This began when he was 11 years old and lasted until he ran away from home, consumed by shame and anger, when he was a 16.

Moreover, he adds, "She went through my brothers, but I didn't know that when it was happening."

Finally, looking for some direction and discipline in his life, Maynard joined the United States Army at the age of 21. When he told certain family members that he took up boxing in the military, they were not the least bit supportive.

"I had something to prove, no doubt," said Maynard. "Some people told me I couldn't take a punch. Other people said if I got hit, I would quit. I had to prove I would run from nobody. As an amateur I didn't run from anybody. They ran from me. I was a great fighter until I met Sugar Ray Leonard and he turned me into a tap dancer."

While training with an amateur team that included future pro champions Bowe, Michael Moorer and Al Cole, Maynard took an interest in Scully and Tim Igo, who, being the only white guys on the team, generally kept to themselves.

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"I was like a four round fighter and these guys were the cream of the amateur crop," said Scully. Even Tim (Igo) was an established amateur, who had fought Michael Bentt. Andrew was the life of the team, a real leader.

"He was always saying, 'Yeah, baby,' and juicing up the team. He was very energetic and positive, a great guy who I was in awe of. I didn't have the confidence to approach any of them, especially Andrew."

One day Scully was reading a magazine by himself. Maynard approached him and immediately made him feel like part of the team.

"He took me under his wing, and suddenly everyone was my friend," said Scully. "When he stepped up, everyone followed. He turned out to be one of the most honest and humble people I ever met, and he treated me with a lot of respect."

"My father always taught me that color meant nothing," said Maynard. "But I knew that really wasn't true. In elementary school I liked a white girl, but I knew I couldn't say hello to her. When I saw Scully and Tim in their own white world, I knew what they were feeling."

"In the boxing game back then, whites hung with white and blacks hung with blacks," he continued. "Whites would pull for whites and blacks would pull for blacks. Sometimes it was like a Joe Louis-Max Schmeling thing, but it was all bull. We were all on the same team and we were boxers. The only people that can really understand a boxer is another boxer, no matter what their color. Scully was cool. I liked him, and I never underestimated him."

That is the kind of inherent decency that has made Maynard such a popular figure in Harlingen, which is in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas.

Maynard's abundance of experiences, both good and bad, is what makes him a great teacher and mentor. He doesn't pull punches and he doesn't underestimate anyone. Too many people underestimated him early on, and he proved them all wrong by winning a gold medal with nothing more than what amounted to on-the-job training.

"I lived it baby," said Maynard. "The good, the bad and the ugly."

Asked what would rock his world at this juncture in his life, he says that developing an Olympic athlete would be a wonderful culmination to a career that to date has brought him more downs than ups.

"That would be it," said Maynard. "But I'd never try to force my style on someone else. I'd take their own style and try to perfect it. For so much of my amateur career, I didn't know jack. I was beating everyone on the desire and determination to prove people wrong. As a pro, I listened to the wrong people."

So his helping to navigate a talented young fighter through the snake pit of amateur would be a nice finale to a checkered career?

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“Yeah, baby,” he responded with so much gusto I could “hear” and “see” his megawatt smile through the telephone.

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