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This past weekend there was a sad story in the New Jersey Star-Ledger on former WBC and IBF junior lightweight champ Rocky Lockridge 44-9 (36 KOs). According to the Star-Ledger, Lockridge has been homeless for 10 years, much a result of drug and alcohol addiction on Lockridge's part for at least the past 20 years. It was also mentioned in the article that the 50 year old Lockridge suffered a stroke a few years ago and walks with the assistance of a four pronged walker.

As it is most often times you really don't know the fighters you train with on a daily basis. Unless you become friends and interact together outside of the gym with them, you have no idea who they associate with or what they do during their spare time. Which was case between myself and former two time junior lightweight champ RockyLockridge. I didn't really know him and couldn't consider or call him a friend and vice-versa. But I can adamantly say that from what I did know of Rocky, I liked him.

It was 1980 and I was fighting as an amateur middleweight. Rocky Lockridge at that time was six months away from challenging WBA featherweight champ Eusebio Pedroza for the title. Pedroza had one of the longest title reigns in featherweight history, holding the title for seven years. Rocky and I both trained at Joe Frazier's gym in North Philadelphia and were trained by George Benton. At that time I lived in Cherry Hill N.J. and I was told that Rocky split his time between Paterson andLindenwold N.J. The fighters who Lockridge hung around mostly fought under the "Tomorrow's Champions" banner and were promoted by Main Events. Rocky was very articulate when he conversed, however he was on the quiet side and seemed most comfortable around fellow stable mates JohnnyBumphus and Alex Ramos.

Whenever I think of Rocky Lockridge training, I think of how hard and fast he ran. During those years I was quite a runner myself and it was always hard for me to find a running partner. I liked to run at a very fast clip to simulate the pace of a fight and had no time for jogging and felt it was a waste of time. This was something Rocky and I shared, making us different than most fighters who usually jogged for long periods of time at a slow pace.

Right outside of Philadelphia there's the suburb of Pennsauken N.J. which is home to Cooper River Park. On the outskirts of the Park there's a 3.8 mile tar bike/running path. Rocky and I would often meet there around 7:30 am and take off. Together we would leave any other runners way behind us before we were even a mile out. Once we made our way around the course and approached the final half mile, we'd pick it up. During those years I ran with friends who ran races regularly, played college football and who boxed and wrestled. Not once did they ever get by or stay with me during that last half mile. The only exception to that was RockyLockridge . I think I may have finished ahead of him maybe three times at the most. Usually, I ended up watching his running shoes and marveling at his perfect stride and envying how he remained so loose and relaxed as he was pulling away from me. Nobody could hang with Rocky doing roadwork, nobody.

Later in the afternoon he'd be focused and do exactly what Benton asked of him during training. Rocky trained harder than any most fighters I've ever been in the gym with -- with the exception of Curtis Parker andMarvis Frazier. What separated Rocky Lockridge from other name fighters on the verge of fighting for a title was he sometimes talked about what he wanted to do once he'd accomplished his goal in boxing and was through fighting. I remember him talking about taking courses in journalism and broadcasting. Which seemed appropriate for a guy like him who always had a unique perspective on whatever thought he was conveying. And according to the Star-Ledger Rocky did enroll in college for two years and studied business.

Rocky said in the Star-Ledger after each fight that he would party "two weekends," adding that he snorted cocaine and abused alcohol, drinking whatever was around. Again, not knowing or hanging around Rocky away from the gym, there wasn't any sign of this nor were there any rumors of it flying around the gym regarding him. Which usually isn't the case. Most fighters and trainers know who the fighters are that are messing around with drugs and alcohol and it doesn't take a genius to deduct exactly who those fighters and some trainers are.

Lockridge also said that whenever he needed money he would ask the Duvas (who owned Main Events) for it and they'd always give it to him. Today, he says that was a mistake and they should've resisted him. Yeah right. Had they resisted him he would've sought another manager or promoter who he could've charmed for the money. There's one thing about world class/championship caliber fighters that most fans don't know -- that is they can be some of the most charming and warm human beings around. I have no love for promoters and managers, but am well aware that fighters will con and bleed a vein supplying them money dry. A fighter with the potential of RockyLockridge along with his cerebral personality and charm would've been very hard to refute if you were the Duvas.

It says a lot that Rocky according to the article is willing to accept some of the blame pertaining to his unfortunate predicament, but that's not enough. According to the Star-Ledger Rocky's biggest payday was $200,000, that being for his fight versus Julio Cesar Chavez, which obviously isn't enough to sustain a man with a wife and two kids like RockyLockridge for the rest of his life. Rocky was an outstanding fighter. I relished watching him put the "Black Mamba" Roger Mayweather to sleep with one overhand right in 1984. That said, Rocky wasn't a truly great fighter and didn't earn the million dollar purses like Chavez or Hector Camacho did.

Like boxing, life is tough. A person also needs to have a Plan B and C. At one time I would've bet anything that Rocky Lockridge had a backup plan and would've never been homeless at age 50. Rocky was/is a smart guy and was aware of everything going on around him. He knew that the life of a world class fighter was short lived and it could end overnight via one fight. Add to that two plus decades of alcohol and drug abuse, what did he expect to happen? It wasn't like what has happened to Rocky hadn't happened to other champions and he was fully cognizant of it.

Alcohol and drugs have destroyed many strong men and women. Rocky Lockridge made that choice and when all is said and done only has himself to blame. I'm sure he was screwed out of money during his life and career. Not to mention the misfortune of having to get through a tough and underrated champion likeEusebio Pedroza along with suffering one of the worst robberies

ever in a big fight versus Wilfredo Gomez in 1985. However, that's still not an excuse to snort and drink your life down the drain.

If I had to pick a fighter who I was certain would never end up in the dire straits the way he has, Rocky Lockridge would have been one of the fighters at the top of the list. He seemed to have too much going for him and had an identity other than being a world class fighter. At the same time when fighters of his stature are on top, they don't believe anything can take them down. That's part and parcel as to what enables them to be successful. But when all is said and done they're people just like everyone else and need air to breath. RockyLockridge was no different and we now know he wasn't impervious to the same temptation and poor choices that are always within striking distance of all men and women.

I feel terrible for Rocky. Lou Duva said Rocky is like a son to him. He also said he'd bring him on to train fighters if he could stay clean and sober. Yet Rocky hasn't been able to hold up to that end of the deal. So once again it all falls back on him. Like everyone else who knows him, I wish him well, but he has to help himself. I'd say a former two-time world champ could very possibly have a future and be an outstanding boxing trainer.

Maybe it's not too late and Rocky can save himself from himself?

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