With the recent passing of former featherweight, junior lightweight and lightweight champ Alexis Arguello, it's the right time to examine and detail exactly what certifies him as being one of boxing's all-time great pound-for-pound champions and fighters.

There are basically only two ways to judge a fighter's true greatness. The truly great fighters like Alexis Arguello measure at the top in both. The first being the level of opposition the fighter in question faced and defeated, and the second is what he brought to the ring and could do as a fighter. A great skill-set obviously is imperative but not the be all-end all. There's been an overload of fighters who possessed a great skill-set that aren't close to or ever will be considered all-time greats.

With the exception of former heavyweight champion Joe Louis and former welterweight champ Donald Curry, Alexis Arguello is the most faultless fighter I ever saw. They were textbook boxers who were technically proficent in all that they did. He was also rare in that he had legitimate knockout power in three different punches, his right cross and his left-hook and his uppercut. Many of his opponents' faces looked as though they'd gone through a meat grinder after only being touched by him a few times.

Arguello was a boxer-puncher who liked to push the fight. Alexis was the prototype boxer-puncher, and at 5'10", he was exceptionally tall for a fighter who weighed under 140 pounds. As a fighter he exhibited tremendous fundamentals and basics. Like a little Joe Louis, he threw straight punches while always keeping his chin down and his hands up with his elbows in tight. Arguello was also economical with his punch output and seldom threw wild punches or wasted many of them. And once he let his hands go they usually found their target.

One difference between Louis, Curry and Arguello was Alexis's hook and uppercut had a more looping arc to them. Like Louis, Alexis also had dynamite in both hands and was dangerous inside and outside. Arguello fought a somewhat pressure style and was the epitome of being an effective aggressor. He didn't pressure his opponents like a Frazier or Duran, it was more a subtle type pressure like Louis.

Another thing Arguello shared with Louis was that they were vulnerable versus fighters who had fast feet. That's not saying they couldn't beat fighters with good movement. I'm simply clarifying that fighters who moved against him usually fared the best and went a little deeper into the fight. Fighters who brought the fight to Arguello are the ones who he defeated in the most devastating fashion. Stepping to Arguello was suicide and left his opponents in perfect range to get nailed at the end of his straight punches on the way in. He never lost to a single fighter who took the fight to him from bell-to-bell. Aaron Pryor didn't even pressure him with regularity and fought aggressively only in spurts.

Alexis Arguello had a great chin and was never really hurt until he fought Aaron Pryor at junior welterweight. Pryor was a beast physically and punched like a strong welterweight. During his

title reign Arguello could fight at any pace and his stamina was never an issue, as evidenced by his two wars with Pryor where both fighters fought at a non-stop pace for 14 and 10 rounds.

Alexis Arguello lost his pro debut at age 16 but would go on to win world titles in three separate weight divisions. After running off 40 straight wins he challenged WBA featherweight champ Ernest Marcel and lost a unanimous decision to the more experienced Marcel. Soon after beating Arguello, Marcel retired and the hard punching Mexican Ruben Olivares won Marcel's vacated title.

On November 23, 1974 in his first fight in the United States, Arguello won the WBA featherweight title with a 13th round knockout of Ruben Olivares. After making four defenses of the featherweight title, Arguello relinquished it. In his fifth fight at junior lightweight he fought WBC champ Alfredo Escalera. Arguello stopped Escalera in 13 brutal rounds to capture the title. After making three defenses of the title, Arguello fought Escalera again and stopped him in the 13th round.

Alfredo Escalera was an outstanding fighter who had made 10 successful title defenses before facing Arguello. He was a clever boxer who threw slashing punches and combinations. Yet in two fights versus Arguello he never figured him out. In their rematch when Escalera tried to lay back and counter, Arguello beat him with the jab and busted his face up. When Escalera raised his hands Arguello administered a brutal body attack. After being pushed to the brink Escalera desperetely went after Arguello hoping to stabilize and hold him off. Once Arguello sensed Escalera's predictament, he stepped away and picked his shots, nearly butchering him as he attempted to press forward. When Escalera was just about slowed to a walk, Arguello set him up and stopped him with a beautiful left-hook that he threw off his lead jab.

In total Arguello would defend the junior lightweight title eight times, more than any other title he held. And many respected boxing historians consider Arguello the greatest junior lightweight in boxing history, something endorsed by this author. The list of fighters he defeated reads like a who's who list of outstanding fighters -- the likes of Alfredo Escalera, Ruben Castillo, and future titleholders Bobby Chacon, Bazooka Limon and Rolando Navarette. In October of 1980, Arguello vacated the WBC junior lightweight title.

Eight months later he decisioned WBC lightweight champ Jim Watt to win his third title. Prior to fighting Arguello, Watt defeated Howard Davis Jr. and Sean O'Grady in title defenses, fighters who were a combined 86-1. After being soundly defeated by Arguello, Jim Watt retired from boxing and never fought again. In his first defense, Arguello stopped undefeated top contender Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini in the 14th round.

In his fight versus Mancini, Arguello fought like a a surgeon. Mancini was an attacking swarmer who had an upper body like a middleweight and threw 100 punches around. Ray's game plan was to jump on Arguello and overwhelm him physically. The problem was Arguello made him pay in a big way for attempting to get inside and work him over. Arguello's tight defense and sound basics enabled him to disrupt and block a lot of Mancini's big left-hooks and right hands. Arguello's straight left jabs and right crosses nailed Mancini repeatedly on the way in. Despite being very tough and determined, Mancini was slowed by Arguello's precision execution and by

the 14th round didn't have much left to resist Arguello and succumbed after getting hit flush with perfectly placed and timed right hands.

After Mancini, Arguello made three more successful defenses of the lightweight title before vacating it, hoping to add a fourth title to his resume. On November 12, 1982, Arguello would attempt to win the junior welterweight title after fighting one time in his new division. His opponent was WBA junior welterweight champ Aaron Pryor, who was unquestionably the top 140-pound fighter in the world. Pryor should've been a two division champ at the least. Due to him being completely avoided during the infancy of his career fighting as a lightweight, he moved up to junior welterweight and challenged the great Antonio Cervantes for the WBA title.

On a beautiful night at the Orange Bowl in Miami, Pryor proved to be too much for Arguello. In a fight that ranks as one of history's best with both fighters dealing out a careers worth of punishment, Arguello couldn't overcome Pryor's speed and power and was stopped in the 14th round. Ten months later Arguello fought Pryor again and the rematch proved to be a virtual rerun with Pryor stopping Arguello in the 10th round. After failing a second time to capture the junior welterweight title Arguello retired.

Had Arguello taken the easy route he could've challenged one of the other alphabet title holders and won the title. However, Arguello was a real fighter inside and out and wanted to defeat the best fighter fighting in the junior welterweight division, and that was Aaron Pryor. Not only was Pryor clearly the bigger man, he also had a style that would've given Arguello trouble during any point in his career. Arguello was a structured fighter. On the other hand Pryor was unpredictable and broke every boxing 101 rule in the book.

Add to that, Pryor was the bigger, stronger and faster fighter. His in and out, up and down herky-jerky movement befuddled fighters like Arguello who pretty much did things the way fighters are supposed to do them. Add to that, he didn't see where a lot of the big shots he was getting hit with were coming from, he'd never beat Aaron Pryor.

Arguello would come out of retirement twice after losing the rematch to Pryor, fighting four times and winning three comeback fights suffering a decision loss in his last bout. Arguello retired with a career record of 82-8 (65) and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1992.

Ring magazine rated Alexis Arguello as the top junior lightweight of all time in its all-time divisional ratings and among the 20 best fighters of the last 80 years in 2002, and among the 20 best punchers of all time in 2003.

Alexis Arguello never lost any one of the three titles he held--and this was at a time when there were less titles--in the ring. He relinquished them and moved up to the next challenge. Based on the most important criteria a great fighter can be judged on, quality of opposition met and defeated along with his overall ability to fight, Alexis Arguello is a certified all-time great and no-doubt one of the top pound-for-pound fighters in boxing history.

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