Arturo Gatti lived the way he fought – on the edge. It is a dangerous locale for fighting or for living.

Boxing fans loved him for it because he was someone who boxed with a reckless passion. He was never out of a fight but always in one, even on the nights when he could have taken an easier path. He seemed fundamentally unable to pass up a brawl for a boxing match, in part because he had a canny businessman's understanding that blood sells, even if it's your own.

Although a more skilled defensive fighter than he often showed, Gatti could be easily sidetracked by a slap in the face. Hit him and he would hit you back…twice if possible. Knock him down and he would get up and walk through fire to return the favor. Bloody his face and the night had just begun.

He was far from the best fighter of his generation but he was one of the most popular fighters of all time, a guy who made 21 appearances on HBO because most of them turned into the kind of back-and-forth peaks and valleys that reminded you what being a fighter was really all about.

When the end came it was violent, both when it came in boxing and in life. The former occurred on July 14, 2007, when Gatti was busted up and beaten down one last time by a kid named Alfonso Gomez. Gomez was a nice kid just doing his job but there is no way he would have ever done a job like that on the real Arturo Gatti.

The problem that night was that all the fight had been beaten out of Gatti, who engaged in more wars than the German army. He was 35 and had gotten off the deck to beat Wilson Rodriguez with one eye closed more than a decade earlier.

He'd gotten off his stool when all was surely lost and knocked Gabe Ruelas out cold in what RING magazine later called the fight of the year. He'd fought two wars with Ivan Robinson before anyone had ever heard of Gomez, two fights so breath-taking they were both fights of the year as well.

He'd been beaten up by a much bigger Oscar De La Hoya on a night he just fought for money because there was no real chance of winning yet came back to fight a trilogy of fights with Micky Ward so brilliant they will be re-run this weekend by HBO as a tribute to what Gatti was.

Of course, warriors all end up badly hurt. Gladiators end up bloodied and defeated. It's part of the job and so it was for Gatti, who spent more time in emergency wards than a hyperactive toddler. He accepted that end of his cruel business as part of the price he paid for glory.

Of all his defeats in a career with many highlights, the worse was near the end, as they always are, when he was forced to the floor a beaten man by Floyd Mayweather, Jr., who really was the best fighter of his generation. That fight was the one that spoke to him, it seemed later.

What it said was that the man who always found a way to get up no longer could.

Maybe that made it easier in some ways to give in to Gomez, who had youth and belief on his side. Gatti's old friend Ward had trained him for that fight and believed he had enough left to win and so was stunned to see the one-sided beating Gatti (40-9, 31 KO) he took before the fight was stopped mercifully by then New Jersey Athletic Commission executive director Larry Hazzard, who leapt into the ring to do what referee Randy Neumann apparently could not – say "Enough.''

"I couldn't stop that fight, simply because he was Arturo Gatti," Neumann later explained. "It was much more dignified to go out that way. He had to be counted out. When he fought, you never knew if he could come back. He looked beaten and still came back."

Not that time, which came as a shock to Ward, who had become Gatti's blood brother after 30 rounds spent abusing each other in an 18-month period. After they were over only two things could happen. They could hate each other or love each other. They chose the latter, which said much about both of them.

"I wasn't sure he had enough to compete for a world championship any more but I thought he had enough left to beat Gomez,'' Ward said this week. "If I'd seen anything different in training I could have told him but I didn't. Even in the dressing room his punches were sharp. But he lost something on the walk to the ring. By the time he got in there all the fight was gone.

"Same thing happened to me in our third fight. I knocked him down and the next round I had nothing left. I didn't belong in there any more. It was like all the fight just left me. Same thing happened to Arturo.''

Last week something worse happened to him. He lost his last fight, this time to his young wife Amanda Rodrigues, in violent fashion. Allegedly the two got drunk at a vacation resort in Brazil, quarreled as they apparently often did and police claim she choked him to death with the strap of her expensive purse while he lay in a drunken stupor.

She denies it but Brazilian authorities say there are no other suspects and no evidence anyone else entered or left their room. All they found there was a dead fighter with a stab wound, a knife under his body and a bloody purse strap. There were about 10 unaccounted hours from the estimated time of death and when she called the police. They say her story doesn't fit. Gatti's friends say privately that it was fitting that the former stripper at Scores, a Manhattan "gentlemen's club'' where men don't always act like gentlemen and the women expect it, killed him with her purse. You didn't need a lot of details to understand what they were saying.

Whatever the truth of Arturo Gatti's final hours, the fact is he died at 37 in the same way he lived. He died living on the edge. He died after a violent confrontation.

He died the way you feared someone so brave and proud and fierce might. He died too young.