

## PINKLON THOMAS: I Was Praying To God To Let Me Die

Written by Rick Folstad

Wednesday, 04 November 2009 19:00

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On Nov. 15 at the Performing Arts Center in Tampa, Fla., former WBC heavyweight champ Pinklon Thomas, after some nervous fidgeting and maybe a quiet prayer or two, will stand up at the podium in front of a large crowd and give an acceptance speech as one of the inaugural inductees into the Florida Boxing Hall of Fame.

It won't be a long speech. Thomas would rather go ten hard rounds than speak in public. But a speech is needed and Thomas will give one.

He could talk about the drug habit he had as a fighter, about that Saturday night more than 20 years ago when he was driving down Interstate-95 outside Miami and saw a semi coming the other way, how he prayed to God to let him swerve into the path of the truck and take his life.

"I was praying to God to let me die," he said. "Then suddenly, I realized God wasn't going to take my life. I was praying for him to do something bad to me, but he wasn't going to do that. If I wanted to kill myself, I couldn't ask God to do it."

Thomas could also talk about a life filled with unbelievable highs and all-time lows, how he finally picked himself up off the floor and brushed himself off with the help of his trainer, Angelo Dundee, who will also be inducted into the FLABHOF on that Sunday.

He might tell the crowd about that bleary-eyed night in February 1989 - just a few weeks after he lost to Evander Holyfield - when he suddenly found himself sitting on a bar stool in Miami at 1 o'clock in the morning after smoking cocaine and weed and drinking booze for five days and five nights. He could tell you how he'd lost 13 pounds, grown a beard and was still wearing the same clothes he put on almost a week earlier.

"I was as red as a beet and my heart was thumping like it was about to bust," he said. "You know that thing where they talk about hitting rock bottom? I hit it."

He went looking for help and ended up on the doorstep of Dundee, who had taken Thomas to the heavyweight championship four years earlier when he beat Tim Witherspoon for the title.

But Dundee wasn't having any of it. He told Thomas to get out of his office, that he wanted nothing more to do with him.

It was Dundee's way of trying to save Thomas from himself, a slap to the face hoping it will bring a good man back to his senses.

"The way he looked, he scared the hell out of me," Dundee said, remembering just how far Thomas had fallen. "There is nothing worse than a guy with that much talent wasting it on drugs. He could box and he could punch. He was really a great heavyweight. But you can't beat drugs, and he was the best example of that."

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It was a turning point for Thomas. He knew he had to put his life back together before it was too late. Dundee had reached him.

“Oh, I shook him up,” Dundee said. “I made him feel so bad it straightened him out. Look at him today. He’s a great guy.”

Hit by some of the best heavyweights of his time, Thomas said Mike Tyson and Mike Weaver hit him harder than anybody.

“But it’s a drag to get hit by something you can’t even see,” he said.

He finished his boxing career with a record of 43-7-1 with 34 KOs, but says the toughest thing he ever faced was his addiction.

“If I hadn’t done drugs, I’d still be champ right now.”

Thomas told me all this 15 years ago when we sat in an almost empty dining hall at the Araba Shrine Temple in Fort Myers, Florida, where he was making an appearance on behalf of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Southwest Florida.

He was 36 and six years clean at the time, working hard to make sure he made it to seven years.

Now he’s been clean for more than 20 years.

Today, Thomas, 51, is still in Orlando, still drug free, and still trying to pitch in and help where ever he can, though it would have been easy at any time for him to slip back into that dark hole that swallowed him up and held onto him for so many years.

When he stands up at the podium in front of that crowd on Nov. 15, he could talk about today instead of yesterday.

He could talk about how he just launched his newest idea, a project called PINK, or Pride In Neighborhood Kids, how children from deprived areas “need to believe in themselves,” and how he wants to help them be “physically and mentally prepared.”

He might talk about his work counseling kids. That’s what Thomas does now. He counsels, he makes appearances, he talks to young people. And he’ll hit the heavy bag if he sees one hanging around and someone tosses him a pair of bag gloves.

The guy who doesn’t like to talk in public has a lot he could say. But he saves most of his talking for the kids he tries to help. Those are the ones he’s trying to reach.

So if he stands up at the induction ceremony and just says he’s honored, don’t hold it against him.

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Just shake his hand and say, "So are we, Pink. So are we."

The FBHOF induction in Tampa is scheduled for Nov. 13-15. For tickets or more information call Butch Flansburg at (813) 810-5896.