

Ray Robinson, Pacman, Ali Is Third-Greatest Ever Voting Over, Debate Begins

Written by Ron Borges

Monday, 14 December 2009 18:00

Over 500,000 votes worldwide have been tallied and the results are now in. What they prove is that while time marches on one constant remains in boxing – the unassailable greatness of Sugar Ray Robinson.

While many might quarrel with the idea that Manny Pacquiao is a greater fighter than Muhammad Ali, as the voters in The Greatest Ever Boxer competition decided by putting the Filipino Flash ahead of Ali in the vote for all-time greatest boxer, no one could eclipse Robinson, who fought his last fight 44 years ago and has been dead for 20 years yet lives on not only in the minds of fight fans but in the deep respect held for his vast set of skills.

Robinson was the only fighter nominated in two weight classes – welterweight and middleweight – and won both divisions in balloting to name the greatest fighter of all-time in each of the eight original weight divisions. Ali was named the greatest heavyweight, which would have pained my father deeply because he went to his grave believing Joe Louis would have whipped Muhammad's ass, an argument we engaged in many times from the time Ali first appeared on the heavyweight radar in the mid-1960s to well past his retirement.

That is part of what keeps the sport alive despite its best efforts at self-immolation. Every generation has its favorites and fiercely defends them. With Pacquiao at the peak of his world-wide fame after defeating Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton and Miguel Cotto in his last three fights in ever more spectacular fashion, his supporters hit the internet hard. Pacquiao got 56 per cent of the vote in the featherweight division, easily surpassing Willie Pep, who got 15 per cent and Salvador Sanchez, who received eight per cent, and ended up with more votes than Ali, which boggles the mind.

Having had an uncle who was a close friend of Pep's, an older brother who believed he was second only to Robinson in boxing skill and having been exposed to many films of him in his prime the thought of a Pep-Pacquiao fight is intriguing because there could not be two more contrasting styles. Pep was the consummate boxer and Pacquiao the constantly stalking puncher. This would have been speed vs. power but the guy with the power also has enough speed to have made it interesting. Hard to say who would win but it would have done big business on pay-per-view.

The same is true if Sanchez got in with the winner because anyone who ever saw him fight would argue neither Pacquiao nor Pep would have been a lock against him.

For my money the heavyweight vote was disappointing but predictable with Mike Tyson finishing second to Ali, a testament to celebrity and ESPN highlights over cold, hard facts. Ali received 48 per cent of the vote in that division, Tyson 18 per cent and Rocky Marciano 11 per cent. The latter is also surprising because even though Marciano was the only heavyweight champion to retire undefeated (49-0) many believe Louis, Jack Dempsey and Jack Johnson would have all been his master.

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For my taste it is Ali, Louis and then take your pick, as long as the pick isn't Tyson. Tyson is a guy who never got off the floor to win and was stopped by Buster Douglas, Evander Holyfield, Lennox Lewis, Danny Williams and Kevin McBride. Did I forget anybody?

He was not only not the second best heavyweight of all-time, he wasn't even the second best heavyweight of his own time in my mind, behind at least Holyfield and Lewis. Just to refresh the memory he was 0-3 against them.

It was to me astounding to see Pacquiao finish ahead of Ali in the overall vote but just as my Dad would passionately make the case for Louis over Ali, surely Pacquiao's fans will argue pound-for-pound his skills rival Ali's. Below is a list of the top three finishers in each division with a word or two on each voting.

World's Greatest Ever Heavyweight

1. Muhammad Ali 48% 2. Mike Tyson 16% 3. Rocky Marciano 11%. Enough said on this category but I would have gone with Ali, Louis and Dempsey.

World's Greatest Ever Light heavyweight

1. Roy Jones Jr won with 37% of the vote over No. 2 Archie Moore, the oldest man ever to win the title, at 17% and No. 3 Joe Calzaghe at 14%. Calzaghe retired undefeated and is a tweener in that the bulk of his work was done at super middleweight so to me, Moore was clearly No. 1, knockout artist Bob Foster No. 2 and Gene Tunney, who retired with a 65-1-1 record, 45 Kos and also the heavyweight title to his credit, third.

World's Greatest Ever Middleweight

1. Sugar Ray Robinson 47% 2. Marvin Hagler 24% 3. Bernard Hopkins 12%.

I have to admit some bias here because of a long association with Hagler but to me again the vote should have been clear: Robinson, Hagler and Harry Greb. Hopkins once said to me when I asked who he wished he could have fought out of all the all-time greats and he said "Hagler." I asked who he thought would have won. Out of respect he replied, "I don't know but it would have been a great fight. We would have both ended up in the emergency room." When I later saw Hagler I related that conversation and his face turned stone cold before he said. "He's right about one thing. We would have both been in the emergency room. I would have gone there to visit him." That's why I love Marvelous Marvin.

World's Greatest Ever Welterweight

1. Sugar Ray Robinson 39% 2. Sugar Ray Leonard 36% 3. Oscar de la Hoya 10%.

Hard to argue with the first two but come on with De La Hoya. I am a great admirer of him both

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as a boxer and as someone who has given much to the sport without once besmirching it. But third best welterweight of all-time? I think even De La Hoya would say "Huh?"

To me the debate would be between Barney Ross, Mickey Walker and Thomas Hearns with Walker getting my vote.

World's Greatest Ever Lightweight

1. Roberto Duran 33% 2. Henry Armstrong 22% 3. Floyd Mayweather 14%.

I would have reversed the first two but can't quarrel with them as clearly the best. My number three would be Benny Leonard, who fought in the 1920s, and is widely seen by knowledgeable students of the fight game as one of the greatest boxers of all-time. Having said that, Mayweather would have done well in any era. Would have loved to see a Duran-Mayweather match because of the contrasting styles.

World's Greatest Ever Featherweight

1. Manny Pacquiao 56% 2. Willie Pep 15% 3. Salvador Sanchez 8%

If you reversed Pep and Pacquiao I would be well satisfied and couldn't really argue all that loudly for anyone other than those three at the top of the list.

World's Greatest Ever Bantamweight

1. Wilfredo Gomez 32% 2. Ruben Olivares 12% 3. Carlos Zarate 10%.

I agree with the first two choices in that order. Although I have great respect for Zarate I would have chosen Panama Al Brown, a guy from the vast long ago but a guy old fight guys used to talk about with great admiration and respect.

World's Greatest Ever Flyweight

1. Ricardo Lopez 27% 2. Jimmy Wilde 20% 3. Michael Carbajal 12%

This is a "wilde" group. I always thought Lopez was very underrated on pound for pound lists because of his size, or lack of it. When you retire undefeated that tells me you were a baaaad boy, especially if you fought as often as he did. My choices would have been Wilde, who many historians rank among the greatest fighters of all-time, first; Lopez second and Miguel Canto third. I am mystified by Carbajal finishing above Canto and some of the other nominees, most especially Khaosai Galaxy, who was 49-1 with 47 knockouts. Galaxy defended the WBA title 19 times, winning 16 by knockout. Carbajal would have been his 17th had they ever met.

I feel nearly as strongly about Pascual Perez over Carbajal. Yet having said that there is no denying Michael Carbajal's popularity and his historical position as the first guy of his size to earn a \$1 million payday and bring recognition to the smallest men in boxing.

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There are my final choices. I'm sure you have your own. Let the arguments begin.