

A Fighter's Last One Percent

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Monday, 18 January 2010 18:00

During the past 27 years since the rematch between Aaron Pryor and Alexis Arguello, I've heard it said by fans and writers that they believe Arguello quit and deliberately stayed down in the 10th round as he was being counted out. I guess it's not wrong to think he probably could've beat the 10-count, had he believed there was a reason to. That said, it's wrong to even whisper that Arguello just quit and gave up. This may come as a surprise to some, but Arguello staying down in his rematch with Pryor is something I have no problem with at all.

Arguello gave it everything he had in both of his title bouts versus Aaron Pryor. In fact I believe he pretty much knew he couldn't handle Pryor after their first fight. His actions and demeanor looked to me as if he didn't buy into the myth of what happened was a fluke or a matter of him just having an off night and really discovered during those 14 brutal rounds that Pryor had his number. It wouldn't come as a shock to find out that inside he thought a rematch with Pryor would be a rerun of the first fight. However, the champion in him is the reason he had to fight him again. He had to know. Pryor very well may have taken 99% of Arguello's belief and convinced him that he couldn't beat him if they fought ten times. But he just didn't take that last one percent Arguello had saying to himself inside; no, this time it'll be different, he just had a good night last time.

As small as it is, that one percent mental can be and usually is a monster, especially if it represents what a fighter wants to believe. Until Arguello either beat Pryor or Aaron took his last one-percent trying to beat him, he'd be tormented mentally by never finding out for sure. In the rematch it was really just a matter of how long it would take Pryor to conquer Arguello's last one percent of belief that he could win. As we saw it took 24 rounds over two fights. When Pryor sent Arguello to the canvas in the tenth round, he finally took Arguello's last percentage point.

Once Alexis was 100% certain he couldn't beat Pryor, there was nothing left inside to drive him to keep going. He at that time realized the outcome was out of his control. Who can forget the look on Arguello's face as he looked up at referee Richard Steele as he tolled the count? His face and body read as if he was saying, "Okay, that's it, you've convinced me, I gave you everything I had and it wasn't quite enough. There's nothing else I can do. But that's okay, I can live with myself now knowing I can't beat you. And if I get up you'll put me back here again, so there's no use getting up. Hawk, you got my last one percent. I know you respect me and won't go out of your way asking for me again. I'm okay with that now."

After the rematch Alexis Arguello was asked why he didn't get up in the tenth round and said, "I didn't want to die in the ring tonight."

Erik Morales faced the same fate in his rubber match with Manny Pacquiao in 2006. There comes a point in a fight or series between two opponents where one fighter finally after each guy has fought with everything they have - one fighter eventually gets the upper hand and seizes the fight and opponent mentally. When that finally occurs both fighters acknowledge it and can move on knowing where they stand with each other long past their fighting days are

A Fighter's Last One Percent

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Monday, 18 January 2010 18:00

behind them.

It's really something how guys like Arguello and Morales will fight so hard and endure so much and never consider they're out of it or can't beat their opponent. Then after taking some massive bombs over two or three fights, comes that one punch and it's like a switch being flipped. The beauty is, it takes so much to finally push guys like Arguello and Morales to that point.

A fighter losing his last one percent is night and day different from quitting.

Richard O'Brien of SI.com described quitting as, "what Andrew Golota did when Michael Grant knocked him down after Golota had pounded him like a drum for ten rounds. It was a real knockdown, but Golota did not appear to be badly hurt. He got up, seemingly fit to continue, the ref asked him the pro forma question about wanting to continue, and Golota said "No." The ref did a double-take and asked again, then waved the fight off so contemptuously that it looked like he might take a poke at Golota himself. Golota had put Grant down twice already and won almost every round, so all he had to do to win was fool around for two more rounds, but he opted not to. That was quitting, especially when you consider that Grant had patiently taken his beating for ten rounds without complaining. Now, if it was Grant, and not Golota, who had gone down in the tenth, and he'd gone down hard enough, I don't think it would have been quitting, exactly, for him to stay on the canvas for a ten-count, even if he had been able to get up and continue."

Alexis Arguello and Erik Morales didn't quit against Aaron Pryor and Manny Pacquiao - they acknowledged that Aaron and Manny were the better men. And that came after rounds of fierce fighting in which they gave nearly as much as they took. All one needs to do to confirm that is ask Pryor what he thinks of Arguello the fighter and the same goes for asking what Pacquiao thinks of Morales the fighter. I'm betting the answer is the same.

Professional athletes in the NFL, NBA, MLB and the NHL quit all the time for various reasons during a game. Often they manage to stay off radar, because in a team sport, such occurrences can more easily be hidden. Or maybe if caught, they're called soft. But fighters must fight until their life is in jeopardy every time out or their called heartless and gutless. No, that's not fair - it's just the way it is in boxing/fighting.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at GlovedFist@Gmail.com