

Scott LeDoux Is Fighting Off The Ropes

Written by Rick Folstad
Sunday, 21 March 2010 17:00

An old friend of mine is slowly dying and there's nothing anyone can do to stop it. There are no miracle cures to slow the disease down or put it in remission, no operation to repair broken parts. You can pray, but don't expect an answer to your prayers.

The hard truth is, the strong body that took Scott LeDoux to the threshold of the heavyweight championship of the world, is being pummeled from the inside by a disease he can't see or lick. He doesn't even have a fighter's chance.

So they threw a fundraiser for Scott earlier this month in St. Paul, Minn., and he was there in a wheelchair, shaking hands and remembering names and faces.

I flew up from Tampa to attend the fundraiser and see Scott, tell him I was thinking about him. What else can you say? You can't wish him well. He's past that. All you can do is smile and maybe tell him a story or remind him of some old memories.

I finally asked him how he was holding up. He told me who could still walk down a set of stairs. He just couldn't walk back up.

There were hundreds of people at the fundraiser, mingling around while a documentary on Scott flashed up on a big screen, photos and films of a guy who lived big.

It seemed strange to wish him well while hoping the end comes quick for him. I can't imagine what he thinks about late at night when he's trying to fall asleep. I'll bet he fights 10-rounders in his dreams.

It will be two years ago this summer when they told Scott, 60, that he had Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS. He had trouble buttoning his shirt one morning and thought it was arthritis in his shoulder.

"You've got to look at it as if you're fighting the main event," he told the Associated Press more than a year ago.

It's a fight he can't win.

A progressive disease that attacks the motor neurons eventually making it impossible to do simple things like walking, talking or even swallowing, no one knows what causes ALS. What they do know about the disease is that it doesn't pick on just the weak or the old. It doesn't discriminate. You don't catch it by eating the wrong foods, living the wrong lifestyle, taking too many punches to the head or hanging around with the wrong people. It takes down the best of us right along with the worst of us.

If you don't know who Scott LeDoux is, he was a heavyweight contender back in the 1970s and

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early 80s when the heavyweight champion of the world was still the best title of all.

Scott came close to that title, flirted with it a few times, yet never brought it home. But he never ducked a fight in his life and he never went out easy. He fought all the good and the great ones back when there were too many legitimate contenders to count on two hands. His record was 33-13-4 with 22 knockouts and his opponents included Frank Bruno, Gerrie Coetzee, Greg Page, Larry Holmes, George Foreman, Mike Weaver, Ken Norton, Ron Lyle, Duane Bobick and Leon Spinks. He fought a draw with Norton and lost a split decision to Lyle.

I remember when Scott - known as the Fighting Frenchman - fought Spinks to a draw back on Oct. 22, 1977 in Las Vegas. It was a Saturday and I was on a fishing trip in northern Minnesota with two buddies and we pulled into a bar to watch the fight on TV. When they announced the fight was a draw, everyone in the bar stood up and booed, thinking Scott had gotten robbed. He was Minnesota's pride and joy, our stake in the heavyweight division and everyone knew who he was.

Four months later, Spinks was the heavyweight champion of the world, winning a decision over Muhammad Ali.

I met Scott when we were both amateurs fighting out of the Twin Cities. We both won Upper-Midwest Golden Gloves titles the same year - he won the heavyweight division and I was the lightweight champ - and we hit it off right away and hung out together when the team went to Massachusetts to fight in the National Golden Gloves Tournament.

A few years later we both turned pro around the same time and since we both lived in Anoka County north of Minneapolis, we used to do roadwork together. Sometimes in the cold Minnesota winters, we'd run at night when it was 20-below. Scott's first wife, Sandy - who died of cancer several years ago - would help Scott bundle up and tell us to be careful we didn't freeze anything off.

Later on, Scott and I fought on some of the same fight cards together in Minnesota, including his second fight with Duane Bobick - who was also a good friend of mine - on July 28, 1977 in front of 9,100 fight fans at the Metropolitan Sports Center in Bloomington, Minn.

When my pro career ended in 1980, I moved away from Minnesota and lost touch with Scott. We talked on the phone a couple times, but that was it.

After his boxing career was over, Scott became executive director of the Minnesota Boxing Commission and also became an Anoka County commissioner.

The last time I saw Scott before the fundraiser was in the spring of 1999 when I was living in Denver and working as a sports writer. I was covering some amateur fights in Colorado Springs when I saw Scott sitting at ringside doing color on a radio broadcast. During a break, he got up to stretch his legs and I slipped in front of him and said, "Hey, LeDoux, how ya doing?"

He nodded, shook my hand and quickly walked past me before he finally realized who I was.

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Then he stopped, turned around and looked at me with that big grin he always had. We hadn't seen each other in almost 20 years.

That night, I went to dinner with Scott and a buddy of his, former NFL kicker Jan Stenerud. Everyone liked to be around Scott.

Then, a little over a year ago, a good friend of mine called me from Minneapolis and told me about Scott and his disease. I wanted to call him but I didn't know what to say. And if I was going to talk to him, I didn't want to do it over the phone.

So when I heard about the fundraiser, I flew up to see him, hug him and talk about past fights and fighters. And to share that special understanding that exists only among ex-pugs. Then I told him goodbye, probably for the last time.

They're saying his time left is short, maybe only months. He won't have good days, just bad days that become worse days.

That's why the next time I get a flat tire in the rain or my cable TV goes out during a big game or I'm late for an appointment because I'm stuck in traffic, I'll think about Scott LeDoux. And I'll smile and remind myself I have no right to complain.

Maybe only months?

No more whining from me.