

REDEMPTION ACHIEVED: Joey Gamache Wins His Last Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 01 April 2010 17:00

Joey Gamache had engaged in hundreds of boxing matches before he stepped in to the ring at Madison Square Garden on February 26, 2000. He was an ace as an amateur, and secured professional titles as a super featherweight and lightweight. His resume was solid as a rock, something he could look back on with pride as a graybeard. But then Gamache gloved up with Arturo Gatti, and his impressive pedigree became tainted. In the mind of fight fans, he was "that guy" who got demolished by Gatti. He was not a veteran of 58 pro bouts, a victor in 55 of those contests, but instead a victim, another notch in the belt of the "Human Highlight Machine" Gatti, the balls-out brawler. "KOBY-2" would be the last listing on his record, because Gatti's fists inflicted severe damage on Gamache, brain damage, to be exact.

He has headaches to this day, excruciating reminders of what went down on February 26, 2000. And they might not ever go away. But Joey Gamache was hoping that he'd receive a measure of relief, an acknowledgement that the beatdown he absorbed from Arturo Gatti at Madison Square Garden in 2001 didn't come about because he was in over his head, a mere opponent brought in to bolster Gatti's diminished reputation. For ten years, he hoped that people, friends, acquaintances, fight fans would get the real scoop on what went down on February 26, 2000, and more importantly, February 25, 2000.

Gamache maintained that the weigh in for his bout against Gatti, in which the Maine native was knocked out, in vicious, near lethal fashion, was overseen in a shoddy fashion, and contributed to Gatti being given an unfair weight advantage on fight night. For ten years, he didn't go out of his way to "educate" one and all about that weigh in, but he hoped that the truth would emerge the right way: through our legal system. For ten years, Gamache battled the headaches, and the psychic pain that flared when he flashed back to February 26, 2000, and the time he spent in St. Vincent's hospital after the bout, being examined by neurosurgeons, as friends and family clustered around, hoping that he'd "only" suffered a concussion, and not a subdural hematoma.

For ten years, Gamache pursued justice. Not revenge. Not an alibi. But justice. For he, and for every boxer gloving up in New York, and the rest of the United States. He pursued the truth, and hoped that a judgment in his favor, a ruling that the New York State Athletic Commission had acted in a flippant, irregular, and downright irresponsible manner, would signal to the world that his loss wasn't merely what it appeared to be on his record. He hoped that a judge would find that the Commission hadn't just showed ineptitude, but in fact a grave disregard for the sport, for the rules and regulations which fighters rely upon, so moving forward, fighters could be assured that the playing field is level when they step in the ring and put their life on the line.

PUT THEIR LIFE ON THE LINE. He needed regulators entrusted to ensure fair play to get that deep in their gut. That lives are on the line when two men glove up. This ain't tiddlywinks. You don't "play" boxing. Gamache almost lost his life on February 26, 2000, as he was knocked down twice in the first round, and then in horrifically violent fashion, for the count, in the second round. With his quest to prove that the weigh in was conducted in a slipshod manner, Gamache wanted to clear up the public record, and send a message to commissions and authorities in all

REDEMPTION ACHIEVED: Joey Gamache Wins His Last Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 01 April 2010 17:00

jurisdictions--this is a life and death sport, and you best take your responsibility to oversee the fighters with the utmost seriousness.

For the record, it was announced Friday afternoon, 29 hours before the fight, that Gamache weighed 140-1/4, and Gatti 141. Team Gamache, which included advisor Johnny Bos and trainer Jimmy Glenn, contended that the scale never centered on 141 pounds, a single, and permissible, pound over the contracted weight limit. Bos saw that the scale didn't level out, and thundered at commissioner Tony Russo. Bos was already concerned when commissioner Bob Duffy, who usually oversaw weigh ins, was shunted aside, and Russo, who lacked experience with the procedure, grabbed the reins. The weigh in for Oscar De La Hoya, the next night's headliner, was in dispute, as opponent Derrell Coley's cornerman Leonard Langley felt that De La Hoya didn't make weight, but was given a pass by Russo, right before Gatti hopped on the scale.

"Weigh Gatti again," Bos yelled to Russo after not seeing the scale settle at 141 pounds, or under.

Russo barked back at Bos: "Shut up!"

The matter was over, the dispute was not open for discussion, in the minds of Russo, or chairman Mel Southard, who exited the weigh in hastily.

HBO weighed both fighters before they walked up the four steps at MSG the next night, and Gamache was 144 pounds. Gatti had puffed up to 160 pounds, unofficially. This, despite the fact that the NYSAC rulebook stated that in a welterweight bout, no more than 12 pounds can separate the fighters. A welterweight was battling a junior middleweight, in effect, and Gamache was stunned when he saw Gatti in the ring that fateful evening.

"I've fought a lot of good guys, but for the first time in my career, when Gatti took off his robe, I was shocked," Gamache said after. "I mean, the size, the presence that he had. I thought, 'Wait a minute, I'm fighting that guy?'" Of course, no rule existed that prevented a monumental weight gain in between the official weigh in and fight night, a glaring glitch in the system that plagues the fight game to this day.

The ex boxer, who now lives in New York City, waited patiently as a case lodged against the New York State Athletic Commission moved forward at a turtle's pace. He pleaded his case in the New York Court of Claims last July, and was pleased at the case laid out by his attorney, Keith Sullivan.

Sullivan too was cautiously optimistic that Judge Melvin Schweitzer would see the situation as they did, that the weigh in for the bout, held the day before, was farcical; that Gatti never made the junior welterweight limit; that state officials, including Tony Russo and NYSCA chairman Southard, didn't follow correct protocol at the weigh in, and allowed Gatti to enter the Madison Square Garden ring with an unfair edge.

Gamache and Sullivan bided their time after the week-long trial wrapped up, as Schweitzer

REDEMPTION ACHIEVED: Joey Gamache Wins His Last Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 01 April 2010 17:00

pored over testimony. They crossed their fingers, and hoped mightily that Schweitzer would note that testimony from Southard seemed to change significantly from a deposition and his time on the witness stand; and that the judge would lean heavily on video of the weigh in, and the testimony from Gamache advisor Bos, who testified that Gatti never made weight, and that he was warned explicitly not to make trouble by Russo after he showed his disgust at the manner in which Gatti "made weight." The state argued that Gamache could have chosen to pull out out of his fight with Gatti, if he felt the deck was stacked against him, and countered that a skill edge, or reach or height advantage was the catalyst for a Gatti win.

Through it all, as the videotape of the brutal rubout was played, and replayed, and played again, Gamache sat stoic. His wife Sissy cringed, and dropped her head into her hands as the court saw the image of Gatti, looking a weight class or two bigger than Gamache, smash the game Mainer around the ring, and heard the announcers describe the beating her husband was taking.

Gamache never for a minute blamed Gatti, who did his job on fight not, which was to inflict damage upon his foe in a violent and conclusive fashion. "He was a fighter, just doing what he's supposed to do," Gamache said. "The commission was supposed to protect us fighters." Tragically, Gatti was found dead in Brazil, under still murky circumstances, in July 2009, while the trial took place.

The system, overseen in this case by men who seemingly had less than proper regard for the gravity of the event, of the sport, had been compromised; and Gamache needed, for himself and fellow pugilists who trusted the system and its overseers, to shine a light on the shameful manner in which rules and regulations were, in his mind, disregarded. He and his attorney didn't dwell on some political certainties, unpleasant ones, which would make their case a harder sell. In order to prove that the state was negligent, and obtain damages, the case would be presented in the Court of Claims, in front of a judge put upon the bench by the Governor. Strange set-up, no? No aspersions being cast on anyone, but ponder this arrangement. Is it in the best interest of the judge presiding over a case such as this to award a vast settlement to a plaintiff, and thus award that plaintiff funds from the state coffer? In a perfect world, a judge would be freed from any motive of self preservation, and would not fear that his or her record would be examined and that his or her term would be more or less likely to be elongated if he or she didn't award vast damages to plaintiffs.

Is anyone reading this under the impression that this is a perfect world?

Is anyone reading this not cognizant of the fact that the state budget is teetering on the brink, and that the state is struggling to stay solvent? Some attorneys shudder at trying to pry a settlement from the Court of Claims, viewing that branch as "kangaroo court" of sorts. Clearly, there would be no "home court advantage" for Sullivan and Gamache. With that daunting task at hand, Sullivan and Gamache pressed on. The case was laid out, and both were satisfied that they made clear what needed to be made clear. And they waited...

Gamache is a full-time boxing trainer now. The New York resident stayed busy, trying to build his client list. In fact, he was in the gym when he got a phone call from Sullivan. It was Thursday

REDEMPTION ACHIEVED: Joey Gamache Wins His Last Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 01 April 2010 17:00

afternoon.

"Joey, the verdict came in," Sullivan said, and drew a deep breath. "It's a mixed verdict. The judge ruled that the state was negligent. He said that what happened at the weigh in was akin to a 'fast shuffle.' He said that commission members were lax in the performance of their duties. ...But you're not going to get any money." Just then the bell in the gym rang. Gamache was silent for a second. Sullivan expected that he'd move away into a quiet office, and get the full lowdown on the decision, a 47 pager from Schweitzer.

"Keith, I gotta go," Gamache said. "I'm training this kid right now. He's on the heavy bag. Listen, you did a great job, thank you so much. We'll talk later."

Ponder this...Gamache wasn't thinking about his case, his redemption, the reasons for the lack of damages. He was thinking about some green prospect's form on the heavy bag.

TSS reached out to Gamache Friday. We could hear his smile on the phone.

"I'm very, very happy," he said. "We succeeded. We proved they were negligent. I'm going to go out with my wife tonight and celebrate."

The lack of damages didn't weigh him down, he said.

"It's never been about the money. I've never been that attracted to money."

Imagine that...As we read on a daily basis about the sickening Wall Street greedmongers who accrue billions and billions with their fancy flim flam trading methods, this guy really could not care less that the judge didn't ascertain that the shady weigh in could be construed as a substantial factor in the beating he absorbed.

Important point: the judge didn't have to be convinced that the weigh in shenanigans, and the weight disparity was the SOLE CAUSE for the pummeling. He only needed to be convinced that it was a strong factor. He had wiggle room, and could have determined that these were two boxers of similar ability, and that a slight Gatti reach and height edge weren't overwhelming factors in his blowout win. Of course, on occasions when a righteous weigh in had occurred, Gatti had won in similar fashion, so it's probably not fair to label the decision an egregious abomination. Sullivan, while disappointed, does not.

Sullivan talked to TSS Friday, and shared his reaction when he called Gamache with the good news-bad news verdict on Thursday.

"This spoke to the integrity of Joey Gamache, and laid out exactly what this case really meant to him," Sullivan said. "It wasn't about the money. And believe me, for most people it is. For 99% it's about the money. Joey never even allowed me to discuss a settlement with the state."

The attorney said he was proud of the fighter for staying in this battle for the duration.

REDEMPTION ACHIEVED: Joey Gamache Wins His Last Fight

Written by Michael Woods
Thursday, 01 April 2010 17:00

"People looked at Joey as the guy who fought Arturo Gatti. Now they'll look at him as the guy who stood up to the State Athletic Commission. That's going to be his legacy. He came out a champion again."

So justice has been served. Maybe it's not an overwhelmingly appetizing entree. Some questions still linger. For one thing, why did Russo tell Duffy to get lost, and do the weigh in? A reason for Russo seeming to favor Gatti, while whispered about in boxing circles, has never been proven, and likely will not be. Russo died from cancer in October 2008. Bos, so vocal about what he perceived as a "rigged" weigh in, hasn't been shy that fallout from his public stance on the matter has hurt him vocationally; he says he's been persona non grata in New York fight circles for years because he railed against that commission. Will the judgment allow him to be vindicated, and make doubters realize that just maybe his rantings over the years have resulted in a lessening of his professional options as a matchmaker?

More certain is the effect the ruling will have on Gamache.

"I feel I'll be able to put the Gatti fight behind me," he told TSS. "I'll put it behind me for sure. It's a win for me."