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When Michael Spinks won an Olympic gold medal at the 1976 Olympic games in Montreal as a middleweight, he was overshadowed by his older brother Leon who also won a gold medal as a Lt. Heavyweight. When Leon won the Undisputed World Heavyweight title from a severely eroded Muhammad Ali, once again, Michael was overshadowed. Yet when his career was completed, Michael Spinks would be the first light heavyweight champion to challenge and defeat the heavyweight champion at the time (Larry Holmes). His brother Leon who would suffer some personal and career bad breaks would retire a forgotten journeyman fighter with a barely above .500 record.

Spink's brilliant career came close to never being realized. Coming out of the 1976 Olympics, boxing was the third priority for Michael Spinks. First was maintaining his job at a chemical plant to help take care of his mother in St. Louis. There were no big contract offers waiting for a signature to turn professional. Second was to help his brother Leon who came out of the Olympics with more promise and expectation. Those who followed the brothers amateur careers more closely felt Michael had the more promising career ahead as a pro . They felt Michael's style was more suited for the pros. However Leon was streaking his way to becoming a ranked heavyweight contender, and was becoming a television staple of ABC sports. ABC was capitalizing having broadcast the summer Olympics and show casing the five American boxers who captured gold medals. So Michael's career was pushed to the back burner. Convinced by flamboyant boxing promoter Butch Lewis in 1977 to begin a professional boxing career, Spinks turned pro. On April 17, 1977. Eddie Benson would be the answer to a trivia question as to who was the first fighter Michael Spinks Ko'd as a pro. History would look back to Benson as being the launch pad for one of the most productive and successful boxing career's in the history of the Lt. Heavyweight division. Spinks brought to the division a style that could be a real pain if you were fighting in the Lt. heavyweight division. He was 6'2 1/2' with a seventy eight inch reach, only two inches shorter than former heavyweight champion Larry Holmes. He had a good long hard jab, his left hook and left uppercut were devastating punches. Let's not forget the Spinks jinx in the right hand. He scored some devastating knockouts (Marvin Johnson, Yaqui Lopez, Jerry Celestine). Spinks could also box from the outside as well, (Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, Dwight Muhammad Qwai, formerly Dwight Braxton). Plus he was extremely awkward.

After blazing through his first sixteen fights which included knockout victories over former two-time Light heavyweight Champion Marvin Johnson and veteran Lt. Heavyweight contender Yaqui Lopez. He was now the top ranked contender for WBA Lt. Heavyweight Champion Eddie Mustafa Muhammad (formerly Eddie Gregory). On July 18th, 1981 Spinks fought the counter power punching Mustafa Muhammad. Mustafa was by far the most formidable opponent Spinks had faced in his career at the time. The usually unmotivated Muhammad showed up in tremendous condition to face the up and coming undefeated Spinks. Muhammad started off very fast taking advantage of his vast experience and his cunning boxing skills. Spinks fell behind early in the fight and was being shut out going into round five. From the fifth round on Spinks controlled the bout by forcing the champion to follow him setting him up to be hit with all

the punches in the Spinks arsenal. Spinks was now controlling the bout landing uppercuts and overhand rights to the pressuring Muhammad. Having the champion cut and bleeding over both eyes Spinks lands his calling card punch, the overhand right known as the "Spinks Jinx" in the twelfth round and puts Muhammad down. Muhammad rises but, loses his title by unanimous decision to the new champion Michael Spinks. From November 7, 1981 through September 18, 1982 Spinks makes five defenses of his WBA title scoring five kayo's. These K.O.s were over some of the divisions best. Angelo Dundee's undefeated top ranked contender Vonzell Johnson, the tough Murray Sutherland and the never been stopped third ranked Johnny Davis, who owned a victory over current WBC Lt. Heavyweight Champ Dwight Muhammad Qwai, (formerly known as Dwight Braxton).

On March 18, 1983 WBA Lt. Heavyweight Champ Michael Spinks and WBC Lt. Heavyweight Champ Dwight Muhammad Qwai meet for the Undisputed Lt. Heavyweight Championship of the world. This was without a doubt one of the most anticipated Lt. Heavyweight title bouts in history. Both fighters creamed the entire division scoring impressive wins over the best of the best. Spinks was undefeated and the once beaten Qwai hadn't lost since dropping a six round decision to Johnny Davis in is third bout as a pro. Qwai had won the title scoring a tenth round TKO over reigning champ Matthew Saad Muhammad. Since winning the title Qwai had made three successful defenses scoring Ko's over Saad Muhammad in a rematch, and knockout victories over third ranked Jerry "The Bull" Martin and fourth ranked Eddie Davis. Not only did this bout have two fighters with legitimate claims as to being the champ. They also possessed contrasting styles. The 6' 2 1/2" Spinks preferred to work from the outside behind his long sharp left jab, using it to set up his devastating uppercuts and Spinks Jinx. The 5' 8" Qwai did his best work inside ripping the body with bone jarring hooks and right uppercuts to the chin. The two fighters styles also offered many contradictions, Spinks could really punch and Qwai was an underrated boxer. Spinks went on to capture a 15 round majority decision to claim the undisputed Lt. heavyweight championship of the world. Spinks shows his versatility against the best opponent he has ever faced. Boxing and using the ring without running, and stopping to plant to unload the Spinks Jinx when Qwai slows. In this fight Michael Spinks puts on a clinic on how to use the jab, he uses his jab as an offensive weapon as well as using it defensively keeping the hard charging Qwai from coming at him with impunity. Spinks goes on to make 4 successful defences of his undisputed Lt. heavyweight title cleaning out the entire division over the next two years. Having run out of worthy challengers in his true division, and having one of the most complete careers in Lt. heavyweight history having never suffered a defeat and defending his title 10 times Spinks hears the call of the Heavyweight dollars.

Looking to build upon his legacy Spinks relinquished his Lt. heavyweight title to challenge the current undefeated heavyweight champ Larry Holmes. Spinks was ridiculed and laughed at for abandoning a division he dominated for eight years and clearly could've continued to dominate with no one on the horizon who would be considered a threat to his title. Having accomplished what former legendary Lt. heavyweight champ Bob Foster failed to, go undefeated at Lt. heavyweight, (Foster lost a decision to Mauro Mina as a Lt. heavy). Spinks set out to achieve another milestone that had never been done by a previous Lt. heavyweight champion, win the heavyweight title. Heavyweight champ Larry Holmes had ruled the heavyweight division for seven years and had a gaudy record of 48-0 and was on the heels of tying the immortal Rocky Marciano who retired 49-0 and was the only heavyweight champion to retire undefeated in

boxing history. On September 21, 1985 exactly thirty years to the day of Marciano making his last title defense against Lt. heavyweight champion Archie Moore, Spinks would challenge for Holmes title. At age 35 Holmes was aging but was still considered a big favorite to defeat the former Lt. heavyweight champ and equal Marciano's record.

On the same night Spinks made history and denied history by capturing Holmes tittle via a fifteen round decision to become the first Lt . heavyweight champion to win the world heavyweight title. Spinks having endured a torturous training regime transformed himself into a 200 pound fighter. Spinks out quicked and outmaneuvered the champ and was able to keep Holmes from dominating with his jab, and moving in and out just enough to keep the bigger man from getting inside. Holmes was outraged at the decision and in a fit of anger made his infamous comment and said "Rocky Marciano couldn't carry my jock strap". Holmes wanted a rematch and the public wanted to see if the transformed Lt. heavyweight could do it again.

Holmes promised he would get Spinks in the rematch and he almost did, coming out hard and aggressive he had Spinks in trouble in the early going. Once again Spinks with his speed and awkward mobility survived and managed to stabilize the fight by the middle rounds doing some effective boxing while keeping the aging Holmes from imposing his strength and will. It wasn't until the fourteenth round that Holmes had finally caught Spinks with the biggest punch either had landed, a bone jarring straight right to Spinks chin knocking him across the ring and almost out. Again the cagy and crafty Spinks survives and comes on with a flurry in the last round and is awarded a split decision by the judges to retain the title.

Having defeated Larry Holmes twice for the title Spinks and his promoter Butch Lewis decided to by pass the heavyweight tournament that HBO and Don King productions were putting together to come up with an undisputed heavyweight champion. Spinks and Lewis chose a different route. After being stripped of the IBF title he won from Holmes, Spinks signed to fight the hard hitting Gerry Cooney who was making a comeback after a two and a half year retirement. Once again Spinks was an underdog to the once beaten Cooney. After one postponement Spinks and Cooney would finally meet in Atlantic City in a bout that was billed the liner heavyweight title. Once again the clever Spinks would endure some rough patches early in the fight and goes on to TKO Cooney in the fifth round. Two months later the new force in the heavyweight division Mike Tyson would win the HBO tournament by decisioning Tony Tucker. This set the stage for much debate as to who was the real Heavyweight Champion. By this time Tyson was clearly at his peak and Spinks was showing signs of being on the wrong side of the hill. However the public demand to see the two undefeated fighters face each other was growing. After months of build up Spinks and Tyson would meet in Atlantic City, the town where both had scored some of their biggest career wins.

The fight wasn't even a contest. It was painfully obvious that Spinks didn't want to be there with a true heavyweight force who was in his absolute prime. Within less than two minutes Tyson was able to do two things to Spinks no fighter had been able to, put him down and out. At almost 32 years old Spinks announced his retirement and would never fight again. Spinks turned down many multimillion dollar offers to comeback, some were for him to fight the current heavyweight champ at the time Evander Holyfield.

It is the opinion of this writer that the Tyson defeat has caused many so-called boxing experts to overlook and under appreciate the unparalleled career of Michael Spinks. When evaluating his career it becomes quite clear that he could do it all. He could box using the ring utilizing his jab and reach. He could punch with either hand having the ability to score knockouts with the hook or uppercut, and the right being the Spinks jinx was the closest punch the Lt. heavyweight division has seen to instant death since the left hook of Bob Foster. He thoroughly ruled a stacked Lt. heavyweight division, not the weak division that Roy Jones dominates today. He never suffered a defeat at Lt. heavy something no other Lt. heavyweight champion in history can claim including legends Bob Foster and Archie Moore and todays current champion Roy Jones Jr. He moved up to Heavyweight and won the championship something all of his peers failed to do and Roy Jones won't try.

Spinks career is overlooked because of the Tyson defeat. However history looks fondly on Billy Conn who was knocked out by Joe Louis in a failed attempt for the heavyweight title. Archie Moore failed against Rocky Marciano and Bob Foster was destroyed by Joe Frazier in the same fashion Spinks was by Tyson. Conn, Moore and Foster never achieved what Spinks did at Lt. heavyweight or heavyweight. Spinks didn't meet his match until he was 3 years into his career at the bigger weight. Why is he forgotten when mentioning hall of fame champions and all-time great fighters? If he was fighting today he would have a picnic with the Lt. heavyweights, Jones included. And outside of maybe a few heavyweights he'd have his way in that division as well. Oh yes Michael Spinks is with out a doubt one of the two or three most underrated and least appreciated champions in history.