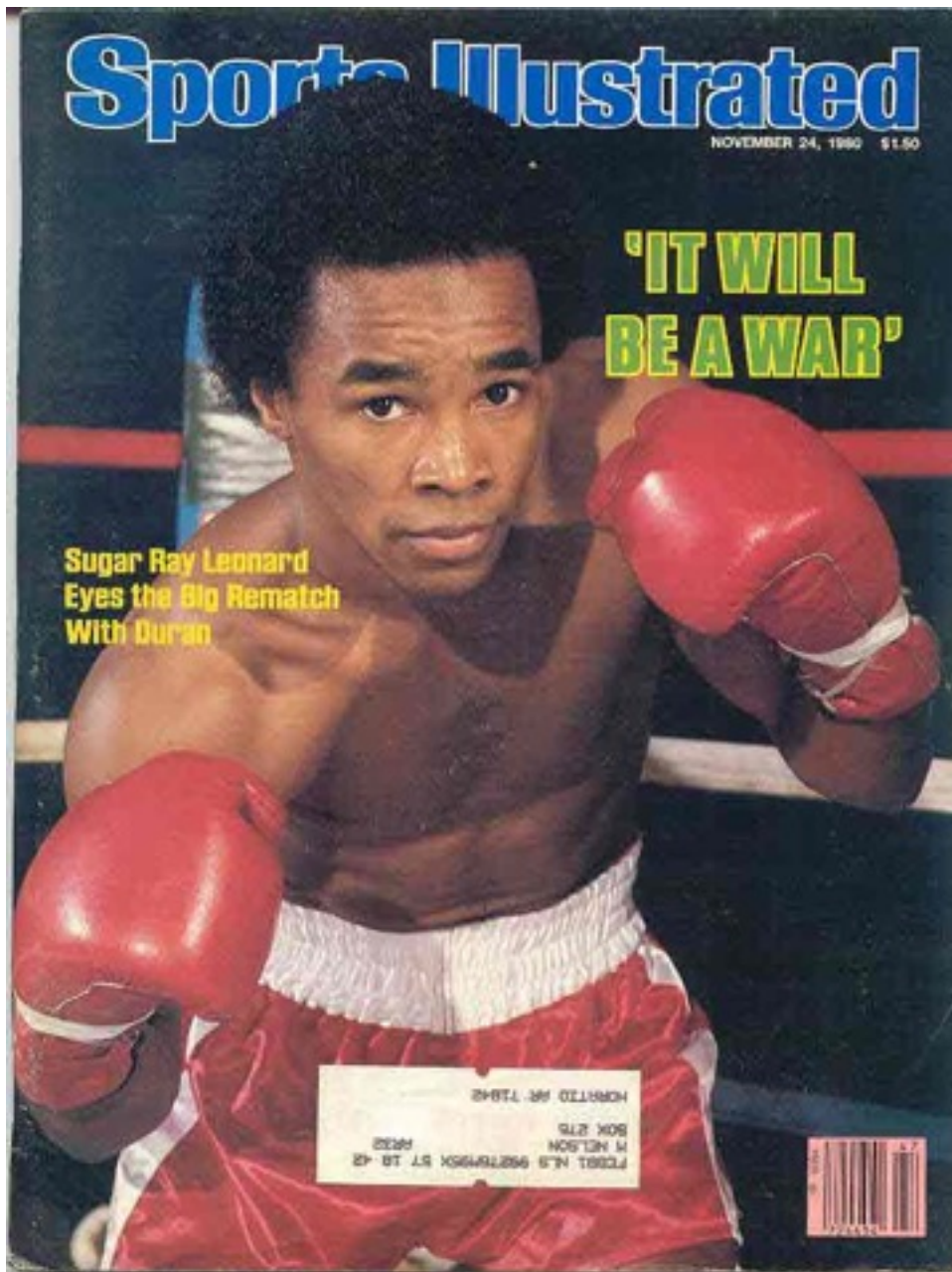


Sugar Ray Leonard: You Must Separate The Fighter And The Person...LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Tuesday, 14 June 2011 07:31



Sugar Ray Leonard has been all over television the past week and a half promoting his recently released biography "The Big Fight" - My life in and out of the Ring. The book launch was perfectly timed (like everything else surrounding Leonard) being that it was released after Leonard's participation on ABC's hit show "Dancing With The Stars" in which Ray didn't make it to the finals, but he certainly didn't embarrass himself either.

Today Sugar Ray Leonard looks fantastic and it's easy to see how he carried the torch passed along to him after Muhammad Ali's title reign ended as the biggest star and most recognized fighter in the world. In his biography Leonard reveals a lot of things that most boxing people already knew about him and his life outside of the ring, that he suffered from depression and

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abused alcohol and cocaine. What they didn't know, nor was it anyone's business, was that he was sexually abused by a boxing coach before he became a super-star fighter, so he says. And he also sheds light on just how much of a womanizer and terrible husband and father he was.

I guess some of these revaluations will turn some off towards him and in fact I've had some say to me since the book's release that they had no idea what a bad guy Sugar Ray was out of the public's eye. And as much as I don't endorse Leonard's behavior in his personal life, I have no idea how I would've handled the overwhelming success he enjoyed as a champion and superstar fighter. What I do know is that I'm not phony enough to con myself into saying or thinking that all those beautiful women along with the alcohol and cocaine are things that I would've turned a blind eye to. But in fairness to Leonard, most of those indulgences came after his peak and during his several retirements.

Sugar Ray Leonard can come clean with all of his past misdeeds if he wants, it doesn't affect me one way or another. The only thing that comes to my mind when I hear about or see Sugar Ray Leonard is this: he's as great of fighter as any that have come along during my life-time circa 1966-2011 following, participating and covering the sport of boxing.

I sparred Sugar Ray Leonard at Joe Frazier's gym two rounds a day for two days back in June of 1979 before his ABC televised fight with junior middleweight contender Tony Chiaverini on 6/24/79. The story as it went around the gym was Angelo Dundee wanted Ray to work with trainer Georgie Benton (who trained me) before he fought Chiaverini because Benton was Bennie Briscoe's trainer when he fought Chiaverini in March of 1978, with the idea that Leonard would glean a little more about his next opponent from George. So that's the reason why Leonard made the jaunt to North Philadelphia during the early summer of 1979.

It just so happened that on day one when Leonard arrived at Frazier's gym around 2:30, I was the only fighter there training who he could work with, and he was adamant about breaking a good sweat that afternoon. At that time I was an amateur middleweight (165) with about 30 fights under my belt who usually weighed in before training around 172. I was known for being physically strong and could take a pretty good punch, not to mention I wasn't hard to hit, especially for a guy like Leonard. Ray didn't care about my inexperience and had to be told a few times to ease up when we sparred because he was so edgy and wanted to work. Leonard's presence outside the ring and in it are night and day different. Standing next to him outside the ring while we were getting gloved up, I thought to myself, "here's where I'll make my name. I'll pressure him and knock him all over the ring." This thought changed quickly and dramatically once I tried to press him. He was like going after a boxer with five arms that had a steel tipped hammer at the end of each arm. His hands, when he cut loose in succession, were a blur and impossible to follow, and the idea of opening up against him was not a comforting thought. But I tried to fake it and bluff him, to no avail of course. While we were in the ring and briefly had eye contact - he looked right through me.

However, I returned the next day at the same time so I could do it again, (and did a little better and actually caught him good once or twice) figuring I'd live through it and would have a good story to tell for the rest of my life. I also remember talking with him afterwards during the week he trained with Benton and it became quite clear that he knew a fight with Roberto Duran, who

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was about to fight Carlos Palomino, was on the horizon for him. And I can say for certain that Leonard held no trepidation whatsoever that he would not only beat Duran, but that he'd stop him when they met. I too felt that way and after Ray almost killed Dave Green nine months later, I lost quite a bit of money (at least for a 20-year old) betting on him when he fought Duran the first time.

Sugar Ray Leonard was one of the greatest of the greats in fistic history. When looking back and thinking of all the legitimate great fighters he defeated over a span of 40 fights, it's easy to conclude that he probably beat at least three fighters who would've mutilated both Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr. As a fighter during his first reign as welterweight champion, Leonard had no weaknesses and was a stone killer in the ring physically and mentally. His good looks and smile fooled many before they got in the ring with him, but inside he was meaner and tougher than a perceived killer like Mike Tyson or any Rocky wannabe. And as he said, he hated to lose and those weren't just words when he said them.

The revelations in his book don't change my view of Sugar Ray Leonard a bit. I never viewed him as anything more than another great fighter. It's no secret nor does it matter that he was at times condescending, self centered, egotistical and a snob along with being the ultimate opportunist. If I do happen to read the book down the road, I hope he sheds light on Dick Eklund, Floyd Mayweather Sr. Armando Muniz, Adolfo Viruet, Marcos Geraldo, Tony Chiaverini, Pete Ranzany, Andy Price, Dave Green, Wilfred Benitez, Roberto Duran, Ayub Kalue, Thomas Hearn, Bruce Finch, Kevin Howard, Marvin Hagler, Terry Norris and Hector Camacho. The other TMZ trash I couldn't care less about. Give me the boxing content and anything else surrounding it in and out of the ring.

Ray Charles Leonard was a blast to follow and watch fight, and that's the only part of his life that I feel qualified to judge him on. Man, he really could fight his butt off and as far as the welterweight greats of the past and present, he is second only to the original "Sugar Ray" - Sugar Ray Robinson.

If Sugar Ray Leonard was a bad husband and father, womanizer, alcohol and drug abuser, he's certainly not the first, and someone new steps up almost every day and willingly takes the baton from him.

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Radam G says:

Ditto F-Lo! Yall better try to learn. Da master is teaching, and don't see it as preaching. Straight-up fo' real! The great boxer -- even the good one -- has at least two person in him. A kick-arser in dat squared jungle, and a kind, nice soul outside it. And he/she know clearly about the separation. Holla!

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brownsugar says:

I'd like to hear more stories like Frank just shared than I would hearing about Leonards dirty laundry... besides way too many have fallen victim to those types of temptation that sapped the remainder of Leonard prime... Great story FLO LO,... but you left out the part where you knocked Leonard down and his coach stepped in to stop the sparring match.

Joe says:

"so he says" - why the eff would he make such a claim if it wasn't true - Sugar Ray Leonard of all people? That's why he was looking through you and kicking your ass at the same time.

Matthew says:

Another spot-on analysis. I read the book last week, and I found it to be an interesting read. As many of you know, I've been a fan of Leonard's for 30 years, and it was he who first got me interested in boxing (ah, the days of boxing on free tv). Certainly Leonard was supremely talented, had an incredible ring IQ, and was extremely mentally tough, but he also had the good fortune of fighting in an incredibly deep and talented era. He had Hearns, Hagler, Duran, and Benitez to measure himself against, and he beat all of them. You're only as good as your resume, and his resume shines. I'm not old enough to have seen first-hand all the welterweight greats of the past (such as Armstrong, Gavilan, and Robinson) but I believe Leonard could have beaten any of them, with the exception of Robinson. I knew about the womanizing and the cocaine and alcohol abuse, but I didn't realize the drinking lasted as long as it did. I'm glad to see he's gotten sober and finally found peace.

brownsugar says:

Spot on INDEED!