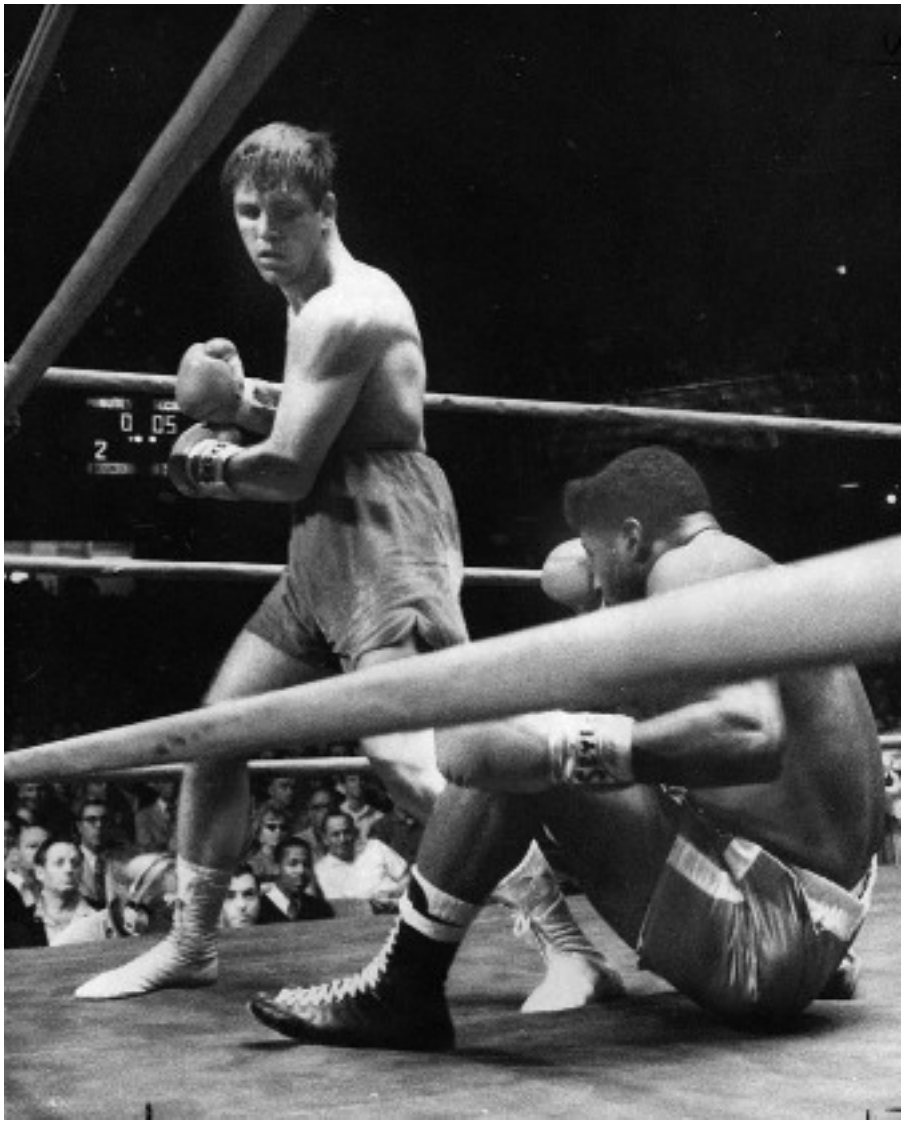

Few books on boxing captivate me, for a number of reasons. So when I picked up the biography of Jerry Quarry called “Hard Luck” I was curious but not truly looking forward to finishing it.

Just because a current or former boxing writer writes a book on boxing doesn’t mean that I’m going to be captivated. Often, I’m disappointed by the lack of interesting information, especially if the subject is a remarkable one like “Irish” Jerry Quarry.

The book was written by Steve Springer, a former sportswriter for the L.A. Times who also covered boxing, and Blake Chavez. One of their main sources was Bill O’Neill, a former boxing writer who was perhaps the most knowledgeable journalist on the Quarry family.

From the beginning the biography of Quarry grabs you with its story-telling and inside information that comes with great research and interviewing. This book on the fiery Quarry family is one of the best I’ve ever read regarding boxing.

It’s really a family history of the Quarrys from their beginning in Arkansas to the move to

California. First in Bakersfield then to Bellflower, the Quarrys were a prideful group who were enamored with fighting in and out of the ring.

Can you imagine the Quarrys walking into the Olympic Auditorium during the 1960s when most of the crowd was made up of minorities? And beer would be thrown down from the balcony to the family members who would be arguing or fist fighting with other patrons. And this was just the female members of the family.

It’s quite a vivid tale of what impact the Quarrys made in Southern California and later the entire country.

Of course most of the story centers on the heart and soul of the family, Jerry Quarry. For those of you who never saw him on ESPN Classic or fight in person, he was one of the best heavyweights to never win a world title. That’s the tragedy of the man who would fight Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier twice and barrel through most of the other heavyweights that crossed his path. Quarry fought almost every top heavyweight in his era. His younger brother Mike Quarry was also a very good boxer who fought the best too.

Jerry Quarry’s life outside of the ring was just as interesting as inside and often the wars with his own family, especially with his father, were fierce too.

O’Neill, who now lives in Riverside, California, was essential in bringing all of the inside information to writers Springer and Chavez. He knows all of the surviving members including Jerry Quarry Jr. who lives in Moreno Valley, a city that borders Riverside.

The world of boxing often has the same tales such as the change in managers, unpaid purses, freeloaders, women chasing, Hollywood celebrities, drinking, comebacks, and failed relationships. But one thing that stands out in this book is the fact that Jerry Quarry and his mother were very close and as fierce as he was inside of the ring, he was a doting son to his mom.

As a teen I used to always look forward to watching Jerry Quarry’s fights at the Olympic. I would watch on television as he rumbled with some pretty tough guys like Tony Doyle, Eddie Machen and Scrap Iron Johnson. Man, those were great fights. Later, Quarry would evolve and fight on the world scene including the historic clash with Ali in October 1970. It was Ali’s first fight after being suspended for avoiding the draft and was seen by millions on television around the world.

In 1994, when I was writing for the L.A. Times, I received a call early in the morning and to my surprise it was Jerry Quarry. “Do you know who I am?” said Quarry to me. I answered “Of course I know who you are.” He just chuckled and told me he was making another comeback. I remember feeling sad because he sounded a little slurry and here I was a nobody reporter who had just started to cover boxing. What could I tell him?

The only thing I could think of telling him was I would relay the information to my editor and wished him luck. He was a hero to me. This book brought back all of those fond memories and also a bit of sadness at what could have been for the great Jerry Quarry.

Comment on this article

Robert Curtis says:

This guy was the best who was born into a racist time who wasn't racist at all. He fought his heart out against champions and contenders just a little bigger than he was. No serious boxing fan forgets who Jerry Quarry was.

Radam G says:

Ditto Bobby C! The Q-Heavy -- Jerry Quarry -- was also born into a time that regular big heavyweights could straight fight. He whup nowadays tallies and fatties BIG TIME. Holla!

JeffD says:

I watched most all of Quarry's career, being from Oakland, and was in L.A. for all his fights and the great ones at the Oakland col. Saw him gifted against Tiger Jones (M.Tenn. Al Jones). What a roller-coaster life Jerry had and he was a very small heayweight but perhaps the best overall athlete ever of all heavyweights.

JeffD