

The Breakdown, Special Edition: Sugar Ray Robinson

Written by Lee Wylie

Thursday, 08 November 2012 22:28

The general feeling among the boxing fraternity is that nobody's ever quite ascended to the same plateau of greatness, or was as virtuosic along the way, as Sugar Ray Robinson. There haven't been but a handful of athletes in any sport, whether it be in football, baseball, you name it, whose ability was deemed so extraordinarily good that comparisons to his/her peers seems like a pointless exercise; the man born Walker Smith jr., the consensus greatest pound for pound boxer to have ever lived, is considered to have been one of those rare exceptions.

And yet, despite much having been written chronicling his life and times, I've found there to be a distinct lack of detail and, I believe, truth when it comes to describing the techniques that Robinson employed between the ropes.

"He could end a fight any time he chose to, with either hand!"

"He was perfection personified, utterly flawless".

"Defensively, he was masterly".

In terms of technical analysis on Sugar Ray Robinson, the above is about as in-depth as I've seen on him.

Needless to say, because Sugar Ray Robinson has attained almost God-like status as a fighter over the years, certain realities regarding his in ring tendencies seem to have been replaced by mythology; tap the name Sugar Ray Robinson into your search engine and watch the folklore regarding his style and technique unfold.

There's no debating that Ray Robinson wasn't an exceptional fighter. He most certainly was. Any all-time pound for pound list that has Robinson's name outside of the top three, quite frankly, shouldn't be taken very seriously. Worst case scenario? Sugar Ray Robinson is, with his 175-19-6 {109} record, at the very least, the third greatest fighter who ever lived. What is open for debate, however, is the misconception that when it comes to how he actually operated

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in the ring as a fighter, Sugar Ray Robinson's genius is often attributed to his God-given talent, which, clearly wasn't the case. I believe it does Ray Robinson a major disservice to put his success in the ring down to nothing else but things he was born into.

And so, rather than simply regurgitate what's already out there regarding Ray Robinson's life story and accomplishments, I'd like for this to be thought of as a kind of case study detailing what it was exactly that made him so formidable as a fighter. Robinson's accolades have been well documented elsewhere so basically, you're not going to find much else apart from Sugar Ray Robinson's fighting style and techniques mentioned here.

For the purpose of this article then, I've broken Robinson's attributes down into two categories; physical and technical. Both Robinson's physical and technical attributes aided one another perfectly, but I feel that it's important to mention them both separately, so that the reader has a clear understanding of just how important each were to Ray's dominance in the ring.

Physical

Height and reach:

One of the biggest misconceptions about Robinson is that he spent most of his career facing "larger" men. As I'm sure most of you reading this will be aware, Ray Robinson, who began his professional career as a lightweight before fighting mostly as a welterweight, eventually went on to compete at middleweight and even once at light heavyweight. I feel the area that is taken for granted the most when discussing Robinson's dominance in the ring as a welterweight is the size advantage he must have enjoyed over almost all of his opponents. At 5'11" and with a 73" reach –big for a welterweight, even by today's standards- Ray Robinson must have possessed a size advantage over many of his lightweight and welterweight opponents not too unlike that of Thomas Hearns. What's interesting when you see Ray on film is that he's nearly always the bigger man in the ring even though most of the footage that exists is of him fighting as a middleweight against perceived larger men. Take a look at the size of Ray next to Bobo Olson, Rocky Graziano, Jake Lamotta, Randy Turpin and Gene Fullmer -all middleweights, all of them shorter than Ray. Even when Robinson fought for the light heavyweight crown against Joey Maxim, who at 6'1" and with a 71" reach, pretty much shared the same physical dimensions with Robinson.

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Robinson has his left shoulder towards the center and his left shoulder



Robinson comes over with a right hook. Again, his head is away from the center.



Robinson has taken a step back before landing the knockout blow. Doing this allows



Robinson has a right hook. He is not in the center of the ring. He came off second best because of

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