Hector Camacho’s life ended as he lived it: in a fight with a man and with his demons. He always did better against the former than the latter.

Camacho was a survivor, both inside the ring and out, but the fight ends for all of us eventually and his ended violently last Tuesday when he was shot in the face while sitting in the car of a friend who really wasn’t one. That man, Adrian Mojica Moreno, was shot dead in a fusillade of

gunfire, nine bags of cocaine in his pocket and an opened 10th one inside the car where the 50-year-old Camacho sat.

Camacho was a fighter to the end, the bullet being deflected by a jaw that never let him down through 88 professional fights. But that tumbling bullet severed his spinal column and he was declared brain dead after suffering a heart attack one night later while still hospitalized a Centro Medico Trauma Center in San Juan. It was several more days before his grief stricken mother made the decision to have withdrawn the plug that was giving him life, something she refused to do until his entire family was around him.

Camacho had brought them all great joy and savage pain, the latter coming from the often uncontrolled life he lived outside the ring. His demons – drugs, alcohol, shady characters, mistrust and bad choices – had been a part of Camacho's life since he was a kid growing up in a hard part of Spanish Harlem. He was jailed while still a teenager for stealing cars and street fighting and dabbled with drugs and alcohol for nearly all of his professional life but fighting would become his way out of a dead-end life that still ended up that way despite winning three world titles and becoming a larger-than-life personality in the hardest sport there is.

"Macho'' Camacho was everything that name implied. His gifts of speed, elusiveness, mental dexterity when working within boxing's unique geometry and a stinging right jab made him a three-time New York Golden Gloves champion when that still carried a lot of weight and would eventually help him win the WBC super featherweight, WBC lightweight and WBO junior welterweight titles and one of the sport's biggest and most noticed names during the 1980s and 1990s.

He had star quality, a kind heart and a well-hidden but true sense of humility, all often overshadowed by the "Macho Man's'' outward armor of bravado and at times cruelty that never reflected fairly who he could be when he was just Hector.

Hector, the guy who befriended so many and who had nothing but time for his fans and anyone who loved his sport, might never have risen to the heights "Macho'' Camacho did however. That is one of the painful sides of boxing.

More often than not its great champions are dogged by internal conflicts, issues that often go

back to tortured childhoods and real fears. Camacho, like all great champions (and for a time he surely was one), carried them with him to his grave. He fought them the best he could, winning sometimes and losing others, but mostly he ran from them, hoping somehow he could outmaneuver life the way he had so many fighters.

But when he was wearing leather gloves and outrageous outfits – one time a loincloth, another time a gladiator's helmet and battle gear – he was a beautiful thing to watch. Being a southpaw that is saying something because few left-handed fighters rise above the term "stinking southpaw'' that accompanies so many of them into boxing.

Camacho (79-6-3, 45 KO) was anything but that. He was a crowd pleaser, a fighter who understood he was in show business, not just the hurt business. While he would grow more cautious inside the ring after a savage victory over Edwin Rosario at Madison Square Garden in 1986 that no one who witnessed it would forget, Camacho was at one time a whirlwind of aggression.

That night he dominated the first few rounds and then was hurt badly for the first time in his career, rocked by the relentless Rosario's right hand in the fifth round in a way Camacho never thought possible. His reaction was a champion's. The Macho Man fought back.

He dominated the next five rounds but Rosario hurt him again in the 11th and nearly had him out in the final round. Ever the survivor, Camacho used his speed, agility and mental acuity to move, hold, grab, run, do whatever necessary to survive.

He was awarded a well-deserved yet controversial split decision, a victory painfully earned. After it was over, as ESPN-New York writer Wally Matthews recalled, Camacho had a typically amusing response to it all.

In those heady days, Camacho and his crowd had begun hollering "What time is it? Macho Time!'' It was amusing at first but it became so much a staple of being in his presence you tended to pack cotton in your ears when attending one of his press conferences or gym sessions.

But after that brutal confrontation with Rosario that night, Matthews asked Camacho again, “What time is it?’’

Tired and bloodied, his face a swollen mask of what it had been when the night’s work began, his reply was every inch Camacho’s.

“Time to go to bed,’’ he said.

Camacho would go on to defeat faded legends like Roberto Duran and Sugar Ray Leonard, who he retired in 1997 with absolute and utter disrespect from the opening bell until the fight was stopped in the fifth round one fight before Camacho would lose nearly every round of a welterweight title fight with boxing’s newest young star, Oscar De La Hoya.

He was never the same after the Rosario fight, having paid so high a price for victory he could never gather back the piece of himself lost that night at the Garden. He became a front runner, someone who could overwhelm less talented opponents but who would grow cautious and movement obsessed when pressed near the edge of that memory of Rosario.

This was never more evident than in 1992, six years after the Rosario fight, when he climbed out of the ring before facing Julio Cesar Chavez to cling to his mother at ringside. It was the kind of hug you imagined normally reserved for men on death row.

Then he went back in and lost nearly every round and the WBC light welterweight title he held at the time to the legendary Mexican. No shame in that. Chavez was 82-0 that night and would lose only six times in 107 fights, nearly all of those defeats coming when he was well past his prime.

Some will argue that Camacho should have been much more than he was in boxing but how can a man out fight himself? It is actually a testament to the size of his skills that he became all that he was as a fighter despite abusing himself so often outside the ring.

He understood the cost of fighting and certainly reaped its rewards but he also suffered its defeats and in the end was still contemplating a return to it, a man lost in his memories.

By then he'd been arrested for theft in Mississippi that briefly landed him in jail, accused of domestic violence several times, divorced and shot a year ago not far from where his life would end. Thoughts of another comeback to boxing after all he'd been through by then was perhaps the cruelest irony of all for a man who once explained away Leonard's false belief that he would be able in his dotage to find some way to defeat a man like Camacho, who though no longer the king of the jungle was still a lion in it.

"He believes in his history," Camacho said.

You could say the same for Hector "Macho'' Camacho. Even in the moments before a hail of bullets not far from his birthplace in Bayamon, a hard part of Puerto Rican real estate on the edge of San Juan, he believed he was still El Gato, the cat, forgetting that even cats have only nine lives.

Comment on this article

brownsugar says:

Very well written piece...

Carmine Cas says:

Great piece, RIP Macho

gibola says:

Macho Camacho means a hell of a lot to boxing fans of a certain age. Great piece. Thank you. RIP.

Matthew says:

For all of Camacho's talent, unfortunately his career is regarded as "what might have been." As Borges pointed out, he was never the same fighter after that gutsy performance against Rosario in 1986. He went from being an exciting stick-and-move fighter to being a shameless runner and holder while throwing the occasional jab. If he had lived a more disciplined lifestyle, he

would have been able to stay at 130 or 135, where he was special. A fighter of his ability should NEVER have gone life and death with someone like Greg Haugen. He probably should never have fought above 140, given his build. While I was personally never a fan of Camacho (his personality turned me off), he did have a great chin and heart. Chavez gave him the beating of a lifetime, and Camacho took it like a man.

Radam G says:

Hector "Macho Time" Camacho is an ATG, PERIOD! He fought the best, and not a single one of them could cut him, knock him down or TKO him. He is the only elite pugilist in the history of pugilism to go fight more than 85 bouts and never get any of the above. His worst battlescar was a swollen eye in a couple of bouts. All the ATG p4p fighter suffered one or all the above.

Hector was special, talented, and stealthy skilled with speed that even a lot of the experts missed his true greatness while it was happening. Thanks to film and video that they can now go review it. And make an honest accessment of how great he was, not just could have been.

Just think about it. All the top twenty of all times was cut and/or knockdown or out and/or TKO! But not "Macho Time." Because he had that special talent and skill that Willie Pep, Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Joe Calzaghe, Money May and Da Manny didn't. They all could not escape cuts, knockdowns and outs, and TKOs. Holla!

brownsugar says:

[QUOTE=Matthew;22661]For all of Camacho's talent, unfortunately his career is regarded as "what might have been." As Borges pointed out, he was never the same fighter after that gutsy performance against Rosario in 1986. He went from being an exciting stick-and-move fighter to being a shameless runner and holder while throwing the occasional jab. If he had lived a more disciplined lifestyle, he would have been able to stay at 130 or 135, where he was special. A fighter of his ability should NEVER have gone life and death with someone like Greg Haugen. He probably should never have fought above 140, given his build. While I was personally never a fan of Camacho (his personality turned me off), he did have a great chin and heart. Chavez gave him the beating of a lifetime, and Camacho took it like a man.[/QUOTE]

Couldn't have said it any better Matthew... with all due respect the dead.. it's good to honor those who have passed before us no matter the differences in personal opinions... and you have done that.. no need to conjure up fairytales.. the truth about Comacho is more than enough....RIP

Radam G says:

And the truth rises right up from the grave. I will be there when Hector is elected in the HOF in a bit over a couple years. He has done the greatest with what he has done. And it is forever. Holla!

tlig says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;22708]Hector "Macho Time" Camacho is an ATG, PERIOD! He fought the best, and not a single one of them could cut him, knock him down or TKO him. He is the only elite pugilist in the history of pugilism to go fight more than 85 bouts and never get any of the above. His worst battlescar was a swollen eye in a couple of bouts. All the ATG p4p fighter suffered one or all the above.

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The reason he was never stopped is mainly down to his "style". Against good opposition, he "fought" (a term I use loosely in this context) strictly to survive.

There's a reason he lost virtually every round to Chavez, Trinidad and DLH and it isn't just because those guys were very good (which they were) but because he had no plan/desire to win even so much as a round in those fights (despite hyping them up like the salesman he truly was). Staying out of harm's way, hugging, clowning and running shamelessly is nothing for a prize-fighter to be proud of. Hector was a showman, a promoter but a fighter only in name post-Rosario. I think it's unfair to great fighters who were cut or stopped at some point during their careers to be compared unfavourably to him because he, according to you, didn't suffer any of that in over 80 fights (although I think he may have been cut by Rosario, though not sure..)

Those fighters showed ambition in trying to win. Hector conned the public pre-fight into thinking he actually wanted to win.

One of he most lingering memories I have was of him in the immediate aftermath of losing to DLH (the post-fight interview) trying to build up interest for a fight with some other fighter (whose name escapes me) who he claimed had been talking smack about him.

I'm not here to dance on the man's grave; whatever you think about him or his lifestyle choices he certainly didn't deserve to be murdered BUT people are going way overboard about his abilities and -worse- his achievements now that he's gone.

Radam G says:

Say what you will. He did what other didn't still. They did what get kayoed, despite fighting to' survive, but did not have the adroitness or chin of Hector. And that is a hardcore fact. They

didn't have the skin of Hector either. He never got cut. They did. Trying to rewrite history of the departed is weak syet that haters feel entitled to do.

Maybe because greats such as MACHO TIME will be thought of for a 1,000 lifetimes and all times. But haters die and that is the sweet end of their cry. Holla!

tlig says:

I'm no hater (except if you count the fact that I hate that word) and have no desire to be known (let alone remembered) outside of my immediate family but imagine if a fighter as talented as DLH fought with no ambition beyond merely surviving in the ring? Imagine if he didn't care enough (or at all in Hec's case) about winning and used all his talent and ability to cling, run and clown in the ring? Do you think he would have ever been stopped in the ring? I believe, given his punch resistance, he probably wouldn't have even been knocked down a single time. I suppose with a career like that in his backpack (with 120-107 (X3) unanimous decision losses to Trinidad, Quartey, Vargas and Mosley) he could claim to be an all-time great since most ATGs had tasted the canvas, their own blood and even been stopped, unlike him who merely settled for running and losing. Weird logic there, dude.

Radam G says:

Everything is what it is. And haters -- no matter how old -- like to play that game and reducing fame.

I was talking with this 94-year-old ex-fighter who was TKO'ed by the late, great Archie "The Old Mongoose" Moore way long ago.

We were discussing Hector Camacho. The old muthafighter told me that Hector was a great, but the Old Mongoose was scary and lucky and nobody should call him great because he got knocked down 70 times and out seven times.

I'm like: WHAT DA DOUBLE FUDGE! SO! 'Well he did get up all but seven of those times and kayoed a recorded 131 fighters! C'mon, SIR! Don't speak bad of the death. They are not here to defend themselves. But one like Archie, his record and films speak loudly for him."

He was GREAT! And this criticizing him is a bit late. Reality and actuality, you can debate. But it will not change fate. MACHO TIME is headed for the HOF, and to be known as one of the greatest boksing wizes of all times. Surviving is stiving. And that is no jiving. Holla!

deepwater says:

Camacho was a legend in NYC during the golden gloves. He had a big following when he turned pro.His fights were big shows like Tyson fights. Movie stars ,politicians ,pimps and hos all came out. He was great at the lightweights. He had nice power and some of the quickest flurries ever.when he moved up he lost a bit and he used his style to last a long time and make

some $. You can't judge a ex champ with 80 fights on the last part of 80. Having 80 fights today is unheard .

Matthew says:

I completely disagree with the notion that Camacho was an all-time great. He was all-time great talent, but his body of work does not lend itself to all-time greatness. Contrary to what Radam says, Camacho was knocked down three times, I believe (the first was accomplished by Reyes Cruz in 1988). He was also cut against Edwin Rosario in that aforementioned 1986 bout. His best wins were against Jose Luis Ramirez, Edwin Rosario, and Cornelius Boza-Edwards, all of which took place at lightweight, and all of which occurred before he turned 25. Bazooka Limon was pretty much a spent bullet by the time Camacho beat him for the vacant super featherweight title in 1983, and he was not a special fighter to begin with. I don't put any stock in his wins over a faded Mancini, 40 year-old Leonard, or 50 year-old Duran. Had he lived a more disciplined lifestyle, he would have been able to to stay at 130 and 135 for a longer period of time, which would have helped him establish a stronger legacy. This is why I look at his career and ask "what might have been?" Yes, I give him credit for taking on young lions like Trinidad and De La Hoya when he was clearly past his prime, but he wasn't the least bit competitive against either of them, and he took a systematic beatdown from Chavez. I give him credit for taking a great punch and having the stones to stay in there against those guys, but he was clearly fighting to survive. While I was not a fan of Camacho, I certainly didn't hate him. Therefore, I am not being a "hater" (ridiculous term), I am simply offering critical analysis of his ring accomplishments.

Radam G says:

He had a total of 88 bouts and never got stopped or cut up by even the bigger fighters that he fought. No other elite fighter with above 40 fights in the history of da game can say that. Unheard to the max. Hector stands alone as being the only ATG p4p who never got cut or knocked down or out. The game is known as the sweet science. Macho Time was sweet and an archmaster scientist with mad craft.

At the HOF, he will be a first-ballot draft. "MACHO TIME, BABBEEEEEE, lives forever! And you know dat! Holla!

tlig says:

[QUOTE=Matthew;22722]I completely disagree with the notion that Camacho was an all-time great. He was [B]all-time great talent[/B],... .[/QUOTE]

He wasn't even that in my opinion. I know it's fashionable to say that these days especially now that he is dead but what was so great about his talent? Apart from speed what else did he have that could have been utilised to greatness? He certainly didn't have a great punch. His footwork wasn't anything out of the ordinary, neither was his punch variety and even his great chin was rarely checked since he spent much of the time in the ring avoiding combat. You know it missed me this whole time that Radam was also claiming he'd never been knocked down as well? Now

I realise he's just pulling people's legs.

A(ny) fighter who changes their style completely based on having a SINGULAR bad round should never be mentioned in the same sentence as the word greatness. And Hector Camacho was not a great fighter. A loud, brash showman with a rap sheet longer than all the tassels on his ring costumes put together? Yes. An all time great fighter? Based on what exactly, conning the boxing public? I know he's dead and it's only decent to speak well of the recently departed but let's not get carried away here.

He changed his style because he knew something some here refuse to acknowledge- that he would have been KO'd by good fighters otherwise.

Matthew says:

Radam, I generally enjoy bantering with you about boxing, and I respect the perspective that you bring to the table as a former fighter, but you are way off here. We obviously have differing opinions about Camacho's career, but facts are facts. Camacho WAS cut on the let eyelid against Rosario (look it up on YouTube if you don't believe me, or read Pat Putnam's Sports Illustrated article about the fight), and he most certainly WAS knocked down by Reyes Cruz in 1988 (the KO magazine which detailed Iran Barkley's upset of Thomas Hearns contains a small blurb about Camacho which made mention of the knockdown he suffered). Wikipedia states that Camacho was knocked down three times in his career. While I'm not absolutely certain of the other two, I know for a fact that he was knocked down by Cruz. To say that he was never cut or knocked down is factually inaccurate. While I can agree to disagree with you about whether or not he was an all-time great (he was not), you are certainly incorrect about those two details.

tlig says:

He was knocked down by DLH as well.

deepwater says:

[QUOTE=tlig;22727]He was knocked down by DLH as well.[/QUOTE]
how many fighters get knocked down and dont get up? getting knocked down and rising to finish the fight is not being stopped. if you box or have boxed you know that staying down is easy; getting up is the hard part. camacho will be remembered for his greatness in the lightweights.

Radam G says:

Matt, you are wrong. Check yourself. It is easy to make up stuff. That's what the __ ___ did before the election. And a lot __ ___ brought it. We know the end results. Reminds me of Tim Bradley. At least his mirage is official. And you can ___ ___s to go with it. But nobody knocked Hector down or cut him. Check the official records. Holla!

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Matthew says:

I am dumbfounded. You can say the sky is brown, and you are certainly entitled to your opinion, but that doesn't make you correct. We all know the sky is not brown, and the HBO broadcast that I have in front of me shows Camacho cut on his left eyelid. Seeing it with your own eyes, clear as day, is not making it up.

Radam G says:

Magazines and first reports are often wrong. People claim that GOAT Muhammad Ali was cut about 10 times. But officially only light-heavyweight Bob Foster cut him. And people claim that Tim Witherspoon was once cut in a bout, but officially, he was never cut. Many people has seem Money May knocked down three times, but officially, it is one time. People claim that crybaby-@ss Juan Manuel beat Da Manny three time, but actually Da Manny beat Marquez three times. Officially twice and a draw. People claim that Ken Norton beat GOAT Ali three times. But official he did it once and lost twice.

The pugilistic experts that be will select Hector on the first ballet for the HOF, and he will be written down as an ATG. I hope you have some age on you, then you maybe dirt napping and won't have to officially hear that. Because it will one day be heard. I expect to still be alive. And I'll get on my big-teeth Asian grin and remember you. Hehe!

There will always be strong hated opinions. I can't count the amount of eyewitnesses that feels the same way about Sugar Ray Robinson that you feel about Hector. And it doesn't mean a hill of beans. Holla!

Radam G says:

YUP! It looks that way, Matt. But I saw with my own eyes Da Manny kicking the syet outta big-footed/damaged-footed Tim Bradley on HBO. But officially it didn't happen. That is what I'm talking about. Officially overrules seeing. BTW, apparently you have never been around a volcano. The sky is brown, black and red as heck. Hehe! Gocha! Holla!

SouthPaul says:

'da hell with resting in peace, be you Camacho, even in the after life. Rampage on, brother!

Matthew says:

I am no longer even debating whether Camacho is an all-time great. You think he is, and you are certainly entitled to your opinion. I believe he isn't, and I think his body of work supports my

statement. We can agree to disagree, and I have no problem with that. I respect your opinion. I do agree that he will probably be a hall of famer (fighters with far lesser resumes have been inducted; see Ken Norton), although I don't believe he should be a first ballot hall of famer. What I am (foolishly) debating is your inability to use your eyes and see what is plainly obvious. Certain things are not even up for debate. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. This we know. The earth is round, not flat. This we know. Go on YouTube and jump ahead to between the fourth and fifth rounds of Camacho-Rosario. Don Thibodeaux is clearly working on a small cut on Camacho's left eyelid (that later required three stitches). Go on YouTube and go to the end of the ninth round of De La Hoya-Camacho. Camacho is clearly knocked down. There can be no doubt. Once again, it's always a pleasure to debate and discuss boxing with you.

Radam G says:

Like I said: "It's still MACHO TIME! Baaabbbbbeee! Hector told me when I was a 12-old-year hotshot National U.S. Silver Gloves Gloves champion that if he ever died, I better keep bytches spittin' about him. So I will be bringing it on at every opportunity. Just look for me at the Pacquiao-Marquez Bout. BTW, I may just be at the Cotto-Trout bout after attending Hector's funeral. Holla!

Radam G says:

I know the actuality of those bouts, Matt. But as time goes on optical illusions rear their ugly heads. Covering up jive and changing it is the stanky -- I mean Yanky -- way. Unless stuff is officially noted on official papers by officials, it didn't officially happen. Kinda like Cristo Columbo gets the credit for discoveriing America because he made it official with the correct accepted definiton of discovery.

Those Vikings, Africans and Asians got no love because of not noting it as a discovery. I discovered a bump on my @ss, but didn't say syet, so when my evil-twin wife saw it, and she took the credit for discovery. Hehe! Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW FTR, you can see the body of Hector in an open casket on Youtube. Holla!