

Ali-Marciano Computer Fight Live on DVD

Written by Robert Mladinich
Saturday, 24 December 2005 19:00

Over the years Mike DeLisa has made quite a name for himself in the boxing community. Besides writing an acclaimed book about former heavyweight champion James J. Braddock called "Cinderella Man," which was published by Milo Books in 2005, he co-authored "Philadelphia's Boxing Heritage, 1876-1976," which was published by Arcadia Press. He has also contributed to many other books and publications.

A graduate of St. Johns's University School of Law, DeLisa, who was born, raised and still lives in the New York metropolitan area, entered private practice but could not shake his affinity for the sweet science. The latest result of his pugilistic passion is a sensational DVD called "The Super Fight: Marciano vs. Ali," which is due to be released on December 26.

Written, produced and directed by DeLisa, this 136-minute film, which is being distributed by the Littleton, Colorado-based Mackinac Media Inc., explores in great detail a long forgotten piece of boxing history.

Under a shroud of secrecy at an obscure Miami Beach gym in 1969, Muhammad Ali and Rocky Marciano – each of whom is arguably the greatest heavyweight champion in history – squared off in a fight that was choreographed according to the findings of a now ancient NCR 315 computer.

Both fighters agreed not to throw heavy punches to the head, but no such rules applied to the body. Under the utmost secrecy, Ferdie Pacheco served as the ring doctor and promoter Chris Dundee, Angelo's brother, was the referee.

Ali, then 27, had been banished from boxing a few years earlier for draft evasion. Marciano, then 46, had retired from the ring 13 years before as the undefeated heavyweight champion. His perfect record of 49-0 (43 KOs) still stands to this day.

The Super Fight was the brainstorm of Miami boxing promoter Murry Woroner, who had a radio series of fantasy bouts between scores of other champions. The outcomes of those fights were also determined by the use of the computer.

Initially, Ali sued Woroner for defamation of character after he "lost" to Jim Jeffries in the radio tournament, while Marciano "knocked out" Jack Dempsey to win the "All-Time" heavyweight title.

The lawsuit was settled when Woroner paid Ali \$10,000 to "compete" against Marciano, with the computer deciding the outcome of the bout. Using some of the top programmers of the day, Woroner rated champions on 129 different variables, including punching power, speed and stamina.

For Ali-Marciano, Hank Kaplan, who served as the technical director on the project,

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programmed the computer using only bouts that took place during the best five years of each champion's career.

At the time Ali symbolized the changing of the guard during a period of great social upheaval. Marciano, meanwhile, represented the Establishment that Ali was rebelling against.

The results of the Super Fight also signified the dawning of the new age of the computer – which was still in its embryonic stages but was quickly developing a reputation for being able to outthink humans, even though humans had to program them.

And so it was that Ali and Marciano – the latter of whom had shed 60 pounds while training and even purchased a new toupee for the simulated bout – filmed 70 one-minute fighting segments which were later spliced into three-minute rounds.

Amid much fanfare, on January 20, 1970, the film was shown one time only at about 1500 theaters around the world.

Immediately afterward, all of the 35 millimeter prints were destroyed except for the one that was sent to the Library of Congress for copyright purposes. (Ironically, Marciano had been killed in an airplane crash in August 1969, less than four months before the release of the film).

The Super Fight played just one more time – on ABC's "Wide World of Sports" – in late 1970. Afterwards, the film became an eccentric and esoteric footnote to the careers of two great champions.

Until now! Using commentary from such renowned boxing experts as Kaplan, Bert Sugar, Mike Silver, Sal Rappa, Tracy Callis, and Enrique Encinosa, as well as boxing executive Bobby Goodman and former lightweight contender Frankie Otero, DeLisa has created a unique film that explores an extraordinary event that transcends boxing.

Not only does the film provide a wonderful perspective and in-depth study of two of boxing's most revered champions, it also explores the coming of age of computers which transformed the way in which the world operated.

"This fight occurred at the dawn of the computer age, when computers looked like enormous dinosaurs and the technology was just emerging," said Andre Blay, CEO of Mackinac Media. "If we fed the same stats into today's advanced computers, would we have the same outcome?"

From Mike Silver's perspective, the most compelling part of the film was the poignancy of seeing the late Marciano – who was worshipped by the youth of his generation – one last time.

"The Super Fight was basically little more than an exhibition," he explained. "But it was like a time machine, because even though both fighters pulled their punches, you got some sense of might have occurred if they had actually fought in their primes."

The film is as much of a sporting story as it is a social study that belongs on the shelf of every

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documentary film collector and in the course programs for college level media communications classes.

Over the years, DeLisa has made many fine contributions to the sport of boxing. With this film, however, he outdid himself. For a man of his stature, that is pretty hard to do. The film is not to be missed.

In addition to the original film and the new documentary, "The Super Fight" DVD two-disc set includes a never before seen alternate ending, extra scenes from the documentary, the original 15 one-hour episodes of Woroner's radio computer tournament, a slideshow gallery of posters and stills, and an eight-page collectible booklet with the fight's history and photos.

The cost of the DVD is \$19.95 and can be purchased through Amazon.com or by contacting: www.superfightdvd.com