

John Scully's cool being the Iceman

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Onetime light-heavyweight title challenger John "Iceman" Scully is known to be as good a boxing philosopher as he is a trainer and fighter. Working out of the Ring 159 Gym in his hometown of New Windsor, Connecticut, Scully trains or has trained Lawrence Clay-Bey, Scott Pemberton, Chad Dawson, Luis Maisonet, and Pito Cardona. He also works with red-hot featherweight prospect Matt Remillard, who says no one amps him up more than the Iceman.

Besides training boxers, Scully – who traveled the world fighting such championship caliber opponents as Henry Maske, Graciano Rocchigiani and Michael Nunn, as well as working as a sparring partner for many of boxing's elite – Scully has an abundance of colorful tales to tell.

All of those stories, and more, are forthcoming in a soon to be published book called "The Iceman Diaries."

"The book will branch out to all I've seen and all the people I've met," said Scully, who is generally referred to as Ice. "I talk about Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson and the influence they had on me. I have a chapter called *Spar Wars*, where I describe what it's like to be in the camps James Toney, Roy Jones Jr. and Vinny Paz."

Probably the man to have the most influence on the now 38-year-old Scully is Ali. Scully read his autobiography "The Greatest" when he was about eight-years-old. Ali wrote that he knew as a youngster that he wanted to be a world champion. To help achieve that lofty ambition, he never smoke or drank.

"To this day, I've never touched a drop of alcohol or took a puff of anything," said Ice. "The reason is because I wanted the same things that Ali did at the same age. I wanted to be big and famous. From the day I started boxing neighborhood kids, I wanted to be a champion."

Scully never held a world title, but he has an awful lot to be proud of. While compiling a 57-13 amateur record, he won several national tournaments. Fighting professionally from 1988-2001, he amassed a record of 38-11 (21 KO) against some formidable opposition.

The highlight of his pro career was actually a 12-round decision loss to Nunn for the WBO's NABO super middleweight title in December 1995.

"A lot of people thought I won that fight," said Ice. "More people know me from that fight than any other. I fought better against him than any other champion. I hold on to the fact that I did so well against him. Michael was a great technical fighter."

Scully recently received a letter from Nunn, who is serving more than 20 years in federal prison for drug trafficking. He gets emotional when talking about his onetime ring nemesis.

"Some smart guys can do some pretty dumb things," said Ice. "How many guys in that business

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knew they were dealing with Michael Nunn? Think of all the people that must have said, 'I just bought or sold drugs from Michael Nunn.' How long could that be a secret?"

Although Nunn had a somewhat arrogant reputation, Scully says he was a very decent fellow. "We talked a lot of trash in the clinches, but afterward he was very respectful toward me," said Ice. "We were at a buffet after our fight, and he came to my table. His mother kept telling him that his food was getting cold, but he stayed and talked. We became good friends. I'm sad that things turned out the way they did."

Scully also has great respect for Maske, whom he unsuccessfully challenged for the IBF light heavyweight title in Leipzig, Germany, in May 1996. Even though Scully's mother Carol was dying of cancer at the time, he concedes that he probably would not have been able to beat Maske, even under better emotional circumstances.

"I was training in Florida and called home to see how my mother was doing, and the police answered the phone," said Scully, who lost a 12-round decision. "My mind was elsewhere, but I don't think it would have mattered against Maske. He was a 6'4" southpaw who approached boxing like fencing. In Germany they really appreciate that style of fighting.

"He was like the Michael Jordan of boxing over there," he continued. "He would just jab, jab, left hand, right hook. I would talk trash just to get him to mix it up, but he wouldn't go for it. He couldn't care less about being macho. He knew how to win and he was lucky that his style was so appreciated in Germany. It wouldn't have been appreciated over here."

Scully also traveled to Deutschland to fight Rocchigiani, a tough crude brawler who was everything that Maske was not. Ice lost a 10-round decision to him in Berlin in March 1997.

"He was almost as big as Henry in Germany – but for all different reasons," said Ice. "When I got off the plane a reporter asked how I was going to handle his rough tactics. Because I'm so analytical when it comes to boxing, I think I beat myself in that fight."

When the bell rang for the first round, Scully said that Rocchigiani rushed him. "I sidestepped him and spun him in a circle," he explained. "It was a great move. But in my mind, I thought he let me do it. I fooled myself into thinking he was better than he was.

"Looking back, I realize that I lost to a lot of guys that weren't as good as I built them up to be in my mind," he continued. "If they didn't throw a left hook after a right hand, I would analyze why rather than take advantage of their mistake. Someone told me I was too smart to be a fighter because I thought too much."

Unlike so many other fighters who were easy to motivate with cliché-laden speeches, Scully said that wasn't the case with him.

"When I was fighting Maske my trainer was telling me to be as brave as my mother, to fight for her because she wanted me to win," he explained. "The truth was my mother didn't even want me fighting. She wanted me to be near her. I never fell for any of that."

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While he didn't fall for any of those ploys, he was not beneath using them if the need arose. He remembers referencing a notorious crime-ridden block in Hartford, Connecticut, while trying to motivate a journeyman named Terry Seay against the then-undefeated future contender Syd Vanderpool.

"I said 'Terry, we're on the Avenue right now and this guy is trying to rob you of everything you have. What are you going to do about it?' Terry got up and stopped Vanderpool in the next round."

Working in camp with Jones was also a memorable experience. "Roy's reputation has taken a hit because he got so bigheaded," he said. "When people start talking about themselves in the first person, their perception might be different from their reality. That really turns people off, which is a shame because Roy's a really good guy."

One of the most misunderstood fighters Ice has worked with is Toney. "I went to his camp to test myself, but never thought he would be so friendly," he said. "But the five weeks I spent with him was like summer camp. We had lots of fun."

A lot of Scully's book explores fighters like Tyson and Toney, both of whom he says are genuinely good human beings who are grossly misunderstood by the general public. That said, one might wonder if Scully, a highly intelligent product of the suburbs who had ample opportunity to go to college, is sometimes misunderstood for his choice of vocations.

"I read my first book at five or six years old," said Ice. "It was Howard Cosell's book *Tell It Like It Is*. There was a lot about Ali in there. Ali was a dreamer, and what young kid is not a dreamer. The only thing different about me is, unlike a lot of other kids with dreams, mine never changed. I followed it through and took it as far as I could."

While in high school, Scully kept company with a Guyanese girl named Rita Khargie. They had an innocent relationship that consisted of him mostly telling her that he was going to fight professionally and become a world champion. He also predicted that she would someday be the mother of his child.

Nearly two decades elapsed where they didn't see each other, but three years ago they were shocked to find out that they actually lived within a mile of each other. They got reacquainted and are now the parents of a beautiful one-year-old daughter named Sarita Carol. The middle name is in honor of Scully's late mother.

"My life hasn't really changed a bit," said Ice. "I still do all my errands and go to the gym. I just take my daughter with me."

Life is looking good for the eternally optimistic and always positive Iceman. He still enjoys boxing as much as he did when he was fighting neighborhood boys on his backyard deck for the WBC (Windsor Boxing Council) title.

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He is in love with his childhood sweetheart and their baby daughter, as well as the scores of fighters of all levels that he considers it a privilege to train.

“I might be a little hyper, but I’m not high-strung,” said the Iceman. “For better or worse, I just roll with the punches. I always have, and I always will.”

(The Iceman's website can be accessed at: www.IcemanJohnScully.com)