While representing the United States in the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Sugar Ray Seales, a native of the Virgin Islands who had immigrated to Tacoma, Washington as a child, vividly remembers the terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of numerous athletes and coaches.

When the shooting started, he and many of his teammates, which included Duane Bobick, Marvin Johnson, Ray Russell, Reggie Jones, Jesse Valdez, James “Bubba” Busceme, Ricardo Carrera, Louis Self, Tim Dement and Davey Armstrong, were confined to their rooms on the seventeenth and eighteenth floors of their hotel.

Even as athletes from numerous nations fled Munich at the first signs of violence, never for a second did that idea cross Seales’ mind.

“Nobody knew that the Olympics would end (be suspended) one day and start the next day,” said the now 54-year-old Seales, who less than a year ago moved with his wife to Indianapolis after more than four decades in Tacoma.

“None of the Olympians knew who was doing what to whom, but there was no way I was leaving,” he continued. “My mom and dad were there and that meant so much to me. I wanted to finish the race.”

Seales wound up emerging from the Games as America’s sole gold medalist, but was surprised at how little the medal helped him at during his career.

“It was like nobody wanted to talk about the 1972 Olympics,” he explained without a trace of bitterness. “It was a tough year politics-wise, with the hostage situation and what was going on in Vietnam.”

Ironically, Seales, a long, lean 6’1” southpaw with amazing speed, agility and better than average power, had been selected to represent the United States at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, the same competition that spawned George Foreman.

The only thing that prevented that from happening was the fact that at the time Seales was only 16-years-old, which was one year shy of the minimum age requirement.

As a result, Seales turned pro with little fanfare in January 1973, winning an eight round decision over Gonzalo Rodriguez. Fighting throughout the American West, he rattled off 21 straight victories, 11 by knockout, without a loss.

In his 22nd fight he traveled to Boston to take on local hero Marvin Hagler, who was then 14-0. Seales left Beantown with his first loss, a unanimous decision, to the man who would eventually reign supreme as the undisputed middleweight champion.

“I was a young boy and I just followed my management,” said Seales. “I had no idea what I was getting into. I was a boxer and a winner. I was cleaning up and really enjoying myself. I didn’t check up on Marvin Hagler. I didn’t think there was any reason to.

“I was surprised at how talented he was,” added Seales. “All of a sudden, here comes a real guy to kick your butt. He wasn’t there to wear you down and knock you out. He was there to knock you out.”

Besides incurring his first loss, Seales said that Hagler’s tenacity forced him to change his style, on that night as well as in the future.

“I went from a boxer to a puncher,” he explained. “I was always a Sugar Ray Robinson type of guy. But now I knew I had to be more of a fighter, stand my ground and fight.”

In a rematch in Seattle three months later, Seales battled Hagler to a draw. Five years after that, Hagler knocked Seales down three times and stopped him in the first round in Boston.

Fighting professionally from 1973-83, Seales amassed a record of 56-8-3 (33 KOS). By virtue of his Olympic gold medal, he then believed that wherever he went he was fighting in his “hometown.” Unfortunately, the boxing establishment did not see things the same way.

He twice stopped a hard-punching slugger named Sammy Nesmith, once in Seattle and once in Nesmith’s hometown of Indianapolis, as well as Art Harris, who was 31-0.

Along the way he lost to such luminaries as Eugene “Cyclone” Hart, Alan Minter, Ronnie Harris, who took his place in the 1968 Olympics, Ayub Kalule, the late James Shuler, and Dwight Davidson. The only men to ever stop Seales were Hagler and Minter.

Having tangled with so many heavy hitters, one might be surprised by the fact that Seales considers Nesmith the heaviest puncher of all.

“He could have one foot in the graveyards and one foot on a banana peel, and still get off that knockout punch,” said Seales.

Since moving to Indianapolis, Seales has tried to locate Nesmith but has had no success. Although they were archrivals in the ring, he would like to reconnect with him in much the same way he has reconnected with Marvin Johnson, his Olympic teammate, who also resides in Indianapolis, and with whom Seales now attends church.

“He (Nesmith) jabbed me in the mouth during the instructions (in Indianapolis),” explained Seales. “He was very rude to me. But I really worked him out and stopped him in the fifth round.”

Another fighter who showed great disrespect for Seales was little known and relatively inexperienced Mayfield Pennington. Seales traveled to Pikesville, Maryland, to fight him in an eight-rounder in April 1978.

Although Seales stopped Pennington in the final round, he still gets annoyed when discussing the shabby treatment accorded him by local promoters. He and his trainer ordered a pre-fight meal of spaghetti with meat sauce. Out of superstition or paranoia, they switched plates and Seales said his trainer got very sick.

And when Seales fought the undefeated Harris in Akron, where Harris was a local hero being groomed for a title shot, he says the promoters put his dressing room in the attic of the venue. Being the first week of April, the room was freezing. Moreover, pigeons were flying in and out as he warmed up.

“I was still enjoying what I was doing,” said Seales. “I was making decent money and I loved the traveling. Traveling to places like London, Denmark and Italy was worth more than the money to me.”

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in August 1980, Seales was thumbed in the eye by the 6’3” Jamie Thomas. Although Seales won the fight by unanimous decision, it spelled the beginning of the end for him.

Although Seales would go on fighting for two and a half more years, his eyes required constant attention. Doctors who operated on him kept saying his eyes would be stronger than ever.

“(Eye operation) numbers one and two were good, but after three and four things got much worse,” said Seales, who would eventually have seven eye surgeries, three on the right and four on the left. Eventually he was declared legally blind and became an unwitting poster boy for boxing abolitionists.

Although legally blind, Seales says that he can see somewhat through his right eye. However, he does not blame boxing, or anyone or anything else, for his travails.

“I am living with it,” said Seales. “My wife says I can only see what I want to see, but I want to see everything. The most important thing is that I see.”

One thing he has gotten to see is the result of his efforts with autistic children, with whom he worked for 17 years at Lincoln High School in Tacoma. He retired from that position in 2004.

“I would teach them independence, living skills, how to change clothes, cook, wash, separate wash, and all sorts of other things,” he explained. “It was a seven year program, and sometimes it would take a student seven years to get something right. You’d keep teaching, but nothing was coming back. But if they stayed the course, one day they’d get it. I still feel good when I talk about it. They learned from me, but it was more of an honor for me to learn from them.”

Being a fighter by nature, a teacher by vocation, and a man of great faith, Seales never allowed or allows himself a temporary respite by wallowing in self pity.

“It ain’t my will to be a blind man just sitting in the dark,” said Seales. “I give the efforts that He wants me to give. I’m always putting my feet forward. I will always be doing that.”

Seales might have diminished eyesight, but his memory is nothing short of astounding. He remembers all of his Olympic teammates fondly, and says Bobick, who had an unsuccessful professional career, was a lot better amateur than he got credit for.

“If I remember correctly, he fought a German and a Russian back to back,” said Seales. “With one day of rest, he had to fight the big Cuban (Teofilo Stevenson) who was knocking everyone out. The roster didn’t go his way. He got no breaks and never got the opportunity to show how good he was.”

Like Bobick, Seales never won a professional title, but unlike Bobick he did have a relatively successful pro career. Moreover, he says that life has been very good to him. Between them, he and his wife have six children and 17 grandchildren.

He says that most of his dreams came true, but is a little concerned about the state of boxing today. While he describes Floyd Mayweather and Shane Mosley as “good, old school fighters,” he says he couldn’t help but be disappointed with the recent heavyweight bout between Shannon Briggs and Sergei Liakhovich.

Even though the fight ended with an explosive knockout, until that point it was a lackluster affair.

“Those guys, they’re not with the program,” said Seales. “Boxing is about more than just winning a few dollars. You have to take pride in what you do.”

His biggest dream now is actually one that has just come to him since moving to Indianapolis and hooking up with Johnson, his old Olympic pal who is also a southpaw.

“We’d love to find a good young lefthander and teach him what we know,” said Seales. “Watching a young fighter develop…….man, that would be something.”