

What's In A (Nick) Name?

Written by Joey Knish

Monday, 01 January 2007 19:00

El Finito," "El Terrible," those are tough, nasty nicknames used by two great Mexican fighters, Ricardo Lopez and Erik Morales. But how about "El Cepillo?" Joel Casamayor goes by the moniker of "Cepillo," which in Spanish simply translates to "the brush." I get the concept, rubbing someone out, but how much does a nickname like that add to a fighter's appeal or marketability? I say none. Taking it one step further, I would suggest that calling yourself the "Latin Snake," such as middleweight Sergio Mora does, actually becomes a negative and not a positive. A Latin Snake? C'mon now . . . why does every fighter feel the need for a nickname?

I'm not sure when it became mandatory that a fighter had to come up with a moniker to go along with his birth name—assuming he even keeps the name he is born with as some do not—but at some point some fighters should just say enough is enough. How many Thai fighters have changed their names to "3K Battery" or something like that? I don't know exactly the number, but I do know that there are at least four of them on record. Fahsan 3K Battery was born Narongrit Pirang and his current claim to fame is having lost to Manny "PacMan" Pacquiao. "PacMan" fights just like the little digital man in the video game, constantly moving forward and eating up everything in its path. It works for him.

Sergei "White Wolf" Liakhovich surrendered his WBO Heavyweight title when he found out firsthand that Shannon "The Cannon" Briggs actually earned his nickname—Briggs stopped Liakhovich in the last seconds of the "White Wolf's" first title defense. Dr. Wladimir Klitschko has a doctorate degree so don't think he can use "Dr." as a nickname so much as it is a title, although there clearly are no rules in the name game, but more often he goes by "Steelhammer." Klitschko recently defended against the "Boxing Banker" Calvin Brock. Brock—surprise, surprise—actually works in a bank. "Steelhammer's" brother "Ironfist" Vitali is also a doctor. Vitali never got his rematch against Lennox Lewis who officially had the nickname of "Lion" but never used it as far as memory serves. He always was the simple, classy "Lennox Lewis," the self-crowned "Emperor of Boxing." I liked it like that.

"The Rose of Soweto" Dinga Thobela recently retired after failing to make weight and retiring on his stool rather than come out for round ten against "Bazooka" Soon Bates in Johannesburg. Thobela was born in Soweto, an acronym for the South Western Townships of South Africa, but found his sweetness had gone stale in losing his final seven bouts which extended back to December of 2000. When I think of "The Rose" I think Bette Midler, not boxing. The movie starring Midler followed the life of a talented but exhausted singer whose life and career were controlled by her manager. Hmmm . . . maybe it does have some relevance to boxing after all.

"Bazooka" Bates shares the moniker which is also used by junior middleweight Ike Quartey, who can fire like a bazooka with 31 knockouts among 37 professional wins. Quartey's last stoppage win was last year over Carlos "El Elegante" Bojorquez. While being "elegant" can win dance contests it makes one wonder when Bojorquez assumed the name for boxing purposes. The Los Mochis Mexican started his career rather clumsily with a 4-1-3 mark and has gone 5-6-0 in recent history. One has to wonder when the "elegance" kicked in, or where it went.

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There is only one "Golden Boy" when we think of boxing, but one has to wonder what Oscar De La Hoya may have used as a nickname had he not won the gold medal at the Barcelona Olympics. Surely the "Silver Boy" or "Bronze Boy" didn't have the luster that the gold medal brought. But, technically speaking, every four years there are a bunch of young fighters who win gold medals at the Olympics, and they are "Golden Boys" too. Looking at some of the fighters on De La Hoya's record it seems that back in the day nicknames perhaps were a bit better. Hector "Macho" Camacho was a tough dude, Pernell "Sweet Pea" Whitaker certainly put something "sweet" into the "science" of boxing. De La Hoya's more recent wins over guys like "El Lince de Parla" Javier Castillejo, who's moniker translates to "The Sharp-Sighted One from Parla" (Parla, Spain being when Castillejo was born) illustrates the possible decline of the moniker madness.

Two of the current heavyweight champions were covered above, with Oleg Maskaev and Nicolay Valuev being the other two major titleholders. WBC champ Maskaev goes by "The Big O," something that may only be understood only between he and his wife, while the "Beast from The East" Valuev is the hairy (everywhere but on his head that is) giant that rules the WBA heavyweight waters. Valuev's first defense was a TKO over Owen "What The Heck" Beck. Beck may have had trouble coming up with a name so just threw up his hands and said "what the heck" in frustration, or perhaps it was born when, coming off two losses in his past three fights before meeting Valuev, fans wondered "what the heck" he was doing getting a title shot.

Whatever the method to the madness, it does sometimes seem to be just that, madness. While Juan Lazcano, the "Hispanic Causing Panic," boasts one of the better monikers out there, too many fall short or have no reflection of the fighter. We can all appreciate heavyweight David Tua wanting to change his birth name from Mafaufau Sita, but isn't his original name simply much more . . . "original" and stylish? I think so, and whatever "Tuaman" is supposed to accomplish for David Tua outside the ring it doesn't seem to amount to much and comes up short, just as the fighter has in the ring.

In the end a meaningless moniker is just that, meaningless.