

## Resolution Time For Harold Sconiers

Written by Robert Mladinich  
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When Harold Sconiers of Tampa, Florida, looks in the mirror these days he doesn't see the journeyman heavyweight with a 15-17-2 (10 KOs) record that most other people do.

What he sees is the dynamic, hard-hitting heavyweight who made it to the finals of the 1996 Olympic Trials, and began his pro career with six straight knockouts and one decision victory.

Since being stopped in the first round by then undefeated Bermene Stiverne, who had won all nine of his fights by knockout, in February 2007, Sconiers has completely reassessed his life and career.

He has come to understand what transformed him from an exciting amateur and fledgling young pro with seemingly limitless future to a nominal heavyweight who had at one point lost 10 fights in a row.

Now aligned with a new manager, David Selwyn of New York, he plans on utilizing that newfound knowledge to embark on what he believes will be the comeback story of 2008.

"I always knew I had a lot of talent, but I never let that talent completely develop," said the 31-year-old Sconiers, who has lost to such notables as Clifford Etienne, Maurice Harris, Donovan "Razor" Ruddock, David Defiagbon, DaVarryl Williamson and Eric Kirkland.

"I had a lot of different problems, but my biggest problems were self doubt and self sabotage. I would do things to make sure I never rose above a certain level."

During his intensive, exhaustive and brutally honest re-examination of himself, he chose to forego all of the negative aspects of his career and instead focus only on the positive. Through lots of reading and candid discussions with his former trainer Larry Berrien, he went about changing the mindset that made him so comfortable with losing.

The first thing he did was look at his complete record from a totally different perspective. Rather than just dwell on the losses, Sconiers lauded himself for beating six previously unbeaten or once beaten fighters. Among them was Ray Austin, who was 14-1 at the time and later challenged Wladimir Klitschko for the heavyweight title.

He also fought Edward Escobedo, who was 12-1, to a draw, and lost a split decision to Ruddock, who has always been a formidable ring presence.

When he examined his 10 fight losing streak, he realized that his opponents had a combined record of 164-32-8. Of the 32 losses, Harris, who had revitalized his once dismal career in much the same way Sconiers hopes to, had incurred 10 of them.

And the always competitive Sherman Williams, accounted for another 10, which means eight

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other opponents had only 12 losses between them. Several were undefeated at the time they faced Sconiers.

“Losing to all of those guys gave the boxing world the perception that I was washed up and just didn’t care anymore,” said Sconiers. “I realized I had to change that perception, and the only way to change it was to change my old habits and my old ways of thinking, dissect everything I’d been doing wrong, and working really hard to establish a new belief system.”

Tapping deep into his own psyche, Sconiers came to realize that much of his lack of self worth was rooted in childhood issues. As a kid he had a passive personality, and both of his parents were college graduates who held what he calls high ranking positions in the corporate world.

He was bright enough to skip grades in school and he scored high on IQ tests. In no way was he destined to become a boxer. His parents had told him on many occasions that he would be well-suited as psychiatrist or attorney.

His life changed when his father held a Mike Tyson fight party at the family home. To say that Sconiers was mesmerized would be a gross understatement.

“I was instantly locked in,” said Sconiers. “I told myself that I have to do this.”

Sconiers ventured to the Frontline Outreach Gym in Orlando, where he met Antonio Tarver, who was roaring through the amateur ranks en route to the 1996 Olympics. Because Tarver was a few years older than Sconiers, he became a surrogate big brother to him. To this day, Sconiers has the utmost respect for Tarver as both a fighter and a friend.

During Sconiers’ amateur career, which consisted of 77 fights, of which he lost 9, his mother continuously reminded him that, in her opinion, “boxing was for dummies.”

Still, he managed to win a silver medal in the 1996 U.S. Nationals, where he beat eventual Olympic representative and future heavyweight title challenger Calvin Brock, as well as the finals of the 1996 Olympic Trials. In that tournament he lost to Williamson and Lamon Brewster.

When his pro career began to get derailed, the young and immature Sconiers blamed everyone but himself for his shift in fortune.

“I thought the problem was outside me, and thought everyone was responsible but me,” he said. “I dumped Larry in order to self-manage myself. I left what had always kept me grounded. Some of the fights I lost I could or should have won. There’s no way I should have lost to Etienne, but all I did was show up. The Ruddock fight should have been mine.”

As Sconiers lost interest and motivation, he also began dabbling in drugs and alcohol. More times than not, he would take fights on short notice. Even if he had time to train, he never cared if his opponents were switched or where he was lacing them up. Resigned to the fact that he was just fighting for money, he didn’t train hard, if at all.

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He'd also pick up a few dollars working as a sparring partner for the likes of Etienne, Shannon Briggs, Jameel McCline, Larry Donald and Kirk Johnson, but the passion was gone. Many of those fighters, as well as their trainers, told Sconiers to snap out of his trance because he was a lot better fighter than he gave himself credit for.

While working with Etienne, the esteemed trainer Don Turner told Sconiers he could make him heavyweight champion of the world if only he'd "get his (stuff) together."

Sconiers said he was at his personal abyss in mid-2003, when he was stopped by Kirkland, who was 16-1, in the first round in Vallejo, California.

"That was a real bad time for me," he said. "I was up all night using drugs and alcohol and just didn't care about anything."

Although it would be nearly four more years before Sconiers embarked on his personal renaissance, when he looks back on his sordid past that is his most vivid memory. He has learned to use that memory to his advantage.

"A lot of people go down the same route I did and destroy themselves completely," he said. "I was close to that point around the time of the Kirkland fight, but managed to survive another four years. It is so obvious to me now that I was trying to destroy myself."

Sconiers is the first to concede that once you fall into the role of an opponent, it is hard to extricate yourself.

"A lot of guys go through this and fall by the wayside," he said. "Look at Emanuel Burton (Augustus). He's an immensely talented guy who's good enough to be competitive and probably beat anyone. But he is in that opponent role, which is hard to snap out of."

Having done lots of reading on positive thinking and overcoming psychological roadblocks, as well as completely revising his physical training regimen, Sconiers believes he has snapped out of it.

Besides the steadfast support of his beloved wife of six years, Jennifer, who just earned her master's degree, he believes that his association with Selwyn is a pivotal component to the success he foresees for himself.

They plan on having a momentous and memorable 2008.

"Harold says he is going to be the Cinderella Man of 2008," said Selwyn. "We plan on keeping a very busy schedule. History has shown that heavyweights are always just a few wins away from redemption. At his best, Harold is very good. It is undeniable that he was his own worst enemy in the past. Now he believes in himself, Larry believes in him, and I believe in him. I'm really looking forward to working with him so he can reach his full potential."

"We plan on a busy schedule and a lot of upsets," added Sconiers. "After my first couple of

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wins, people will probably say they were a fluke. I'm not quite the Cinderella Man and I'm not quite Rocky, but I am an underdog who can make it. Hope sells in boxing, and I plan on being one of the biggest stories of the new year."

Manager Dave Selwyn can be contacted at: [Boxingkid@aol.com](mailto:Boxingkid@aol.com) or 845-893-2829.

\*photo courtesy Harold Sconiers