

Thomas Hearn: Hall Of Famer, You Better Believe It...LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Wednesday, 12 October 2011 09:17



As most boxing fans and observers are aware by now, former five division champ Thomas Hearn 61-5-1 (48) has been nominated for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, and he will no doubt be officially inducted this coming June in Canastota, New York. Nominating an athlete to any HOF can be tricky because everyone uses different criteria to determine if one athlete is more worthy than another as a legitimate HOF'er. Then again, there are those that when you hear their name, you don't have to debate with yourself for a second whether or not they belong, you know they do without even thinking about it. However, there are some fighters in the IBHOF who shouldn't be there. For instance, when you hear the names Ingemar Johansson or Ken Norton, both are former heavyweight champions and HOF inductees. Are they worthy of HOF status? I say no and since their official inductions in 2002 (Johansson) and 1992 (Norton), I still haven't figured out exactly why they're there.

Then there's a fighter like Thomas Hearn, who the very second you hear he's a nominee, you say yes. If there ever was a fighter who's a first ballot HOF'er, it's Hearn. Think about the credentials of the former "Hitman." Hearn has to be considered one of the top 10 pound-for-pound punchers in boxing history. During a career that spanned from 1977 through 2006, Hearn won titles at welterweight, junior middleweight, middleweight, super-middleweight and light heavyweight. And in the midst of doing so he stopped fighters weighing between 147-190 pounds. And there are plenty of stories throughout different gyms throughout the country where he bested and even stopped some good heavyweights while sparring.

Hearn possessed a 78 inch reach as a welterweight, had a piston like left jab, a heat seeking missile for a right hand and a devastating left hook, especially to the body. That makes three

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different punches he could end a fight with. The list of fighters who that could be said about is short. In addition to that, Hearn's has to rank as one of the top five greatest welterweights in boxing history and a terrific case can be made that he's the greatest junior middleweight in the history of the division. This is a fighter whose prime was during the 1980s, which may be one of the strongest and deepest decades ever for great fighters, excluding heavyweights. And if you want to start a list of the top five pound-for-pound fighters of the 1980s, only Sugar Ray Leonard and Michael Spinks deserve to rank ahead of Hearn's.

But that's just part of the story.

The opposition Hearn's faced and defeated during his career is a mini hall-of-fame list in itself. Hearn's basically retired Sugar Ray Leonard after their first fight and was about five minutes away from winning it before succumbing in the 14th round to a desperate Leonard who was trailing on the scorecards when the fight ended. And although Hearn's is officially 0-1-1 against Ray, everyone who saw their rematch knows he won it, and Leonard has admitted so himself in his recently released auto-biography and also during several interviews he's given since the bout 22 years ago. Hearn's is also the only fighter to knock out the real Roberto Duran. In fact Roberto fell face first courtesy of one Hearn's right hand to the chin. He also devastated Pipino Cuevas to win the welterweight title and out-boxed and out-fought the once beaten Wilfred Benitez during a junior middleweight title bout. In his first challenge for the middleweight title, Hearn's was stopped by Marvin Hagler in the third round in what is regarded as one of the most exciting fights in championship history.

Part of the beauty and greatness of Thomas Hearn's is he fought everybody who was somebody and gave the sport of professional boxing all he had every time out, win or lose. He never boasted after an impressive knockout and never made excuses after a loss. Over the years some have described him as a fighter who didn't have such a great chin. Luckily, they've been smart enough to never question his heart, but label his chin as suspect, something I'm not on board with. Only Iran Barkley stopped him with one punch, and that was a lottery shot in a bout that was just about to be halted because Hearn's was tearing Iran apart. In their rematch six years later at light heavyweight a shot Hearn's went the distance with Barkley. Sure, he was stopped by both Leonard and Hagler, but Leonard, who was a terrific puncher himself at welterweight, hit him for 14 rounds before finally finishing him, and Hagler hit him more times clean in three rounds than any other fighter he hit in 10 rounds before he was stopped.

Another mark against Hearn's is the fact that he lost the two signature fights of his career, to Leonard at 147 in 1981 and Hagler at 160 in 1985. But is that so bad? Think about it, Leonard is considered by many historians as the second greatest welterweight of all-time and only ranks behind Sugar Ray Robinson - and those same historians consider Hagler amongst the five greatest middleweights ever. And it's a fact the legacy of both Leonard and Hagler were cemented because they beat Hearn's when they did. If Hearn's wasn't great, then why does beating him circa 1981-1985 solidify their credentials as all-time greats? And in all fairness, Hearn's is really 1-1 against Leonard.

As for why Hearn's ranks above Hagler pound-for-pound despite losing to him... It's partly because he accomplished more and not only won the middleweight title after losing to Hagler,

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he also won a piece of the light heavyweight title twice, as well. Marvin never left the middleweight division and formed a lot of his legacy beating smaller fighters who moved up, whereas Hearn sought the bigger challenges at higher weights. Hearn was also a better puncher and more versatile than Hagler, and against two common marquee opponents, Leonard and Duran, Hearn inflicted more damage on Leonard and devastated Duran 10 months after Roberto went 15-rounds with Hagler. As to their versatility, Hagler was great when his opponent pressed him, but if he had to force the fight as he did against Duran and Leonard, he was significantly less effective, as opposed to Hearn who could use the ring and box or he could be a catch and kill attacker.

For whatever the reason, some fighters never get their just due from the fans and media. Thomas Hearn is a great example of that. Maybe he's best remembered for losing to Leonard and Hagler in two highly promoted superfights that were seen worldwide. Regardless of the reason, Hearn is a certified all-time great and provided fans with many more thrilling and exciting fights than Leonard and Hagler combined.

Just in case anyone is cloudy about Hearn as a fighter, let me repeat, he's one of the top 10 greatest pound-for-pound punchers in boxing history. One of the five greatest welterweights of all-time and one of the top three fighters of the 1980s. He could box and punch, he fought the greatest fighters of his era in between 147-168, and he's beyond all doubt a Hall-of-Fame fighter/boxer.

Lastly, think about what he would do to Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao at 147 if he were around today. The Hearn who destroyed Cuevas and fought Leonard in 1981 would be a nightmare for either Floyd or Manny. In fact Mayweather would demand Hearn enter the ring with his right elbow and left knee in a brace, and Pacquiao would make him weigh in at 143 five minutes before they entered the ring.

Thomas Hearn was a real fighter and his inclusion into the IBHOF actually adds a little credibility to what's become a very watered down hall.

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mortcola says:

Nice article. Big Hearn fan! Your appreciation of his under-appreciated hook is apt - that torpedo to the midsection was a dramatic punch. I disagree with his ranking above Hagler, though. Hagler was more consistent, more dominant, had the better chin, better stamina, and, in his prime, definitely fought and beat or destroyed legitimate top-tier middleweights. Part of Hearn's appeal, once he moved up, was his ability to fight through a definite vulnerability - that chin could crack much more easily than you say, those legs turned to rubber with minimal provocation, and he had lots of trouble against a variety of fighters who were not, in the big

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picture, in his league, not to mention his eventual crumbling against the great Hagler and Leonard. But the heart, skill, and beautiful power punching indeed make him a HOF cinch.

Radam G says:

Wow! Straight-up do I ditto mortcola. Tommy was great, but did have a lot of flaws with fighters -- not "in his league" -- like the nowadays [Rev.] James "The Heat" Kinchen. Everyone and his cousin know that Tommy got a gift decision again him. And one would think that Iran Barkley would not be able to wear the Hitman's jockstrap. But IB straight-up owned Tommy.

I too cannot see how Tommy can be ranked above the Mavelous one. If the moola would have been right, I don't see how Marvelous Marvin Hagler could not have won one of those alphabet titles at light-heavyweight, himself. And, of course, he probably would stayed around to win the psuedo-supermiddleweight title. You know what, MMH were an undisputed champion. Tommy never was. Just think about it. Holla!

the Roast says:

The Hitman is one of the ATG's no doubt. He just happened to run into Sugar Ray and Hagler in his two biggest fights. Hearn was robbed in the rematch vs SRL, crushed Duran, beat Benitez, and won belts from 147-175.

Robert Curtis says:

Hearn was an ATG unfortunately born into the era of ATGs Hagler and Leonard. The way Hearn dismantled Roberto Duran was frightening. I'm sure Duran wouldn't rank Hearn less than HOF. Duran, at whatever his weight was supposed to be, was deadlier than them all.

Condor says:

Not even debatable, Hearn is a first-ballot no-brainer HOF'er. One of the ATG's of my 40 years, and a MAJOR player of those great 80's round-robins. Even in defeat, his stature was elevated. The loss to Leonard (1) and Hagler were record book losses, but wins in the eyes of history. There's no shame in being on the losing end of those magnificent bouts. He decimated Cuevas, in 1984 did to Duran what NO MAN ever did to RD, would engage in a couple of great wars with Iran Barkley, who simply had his number after numerous ring wars, and beat Virgil Hill. And he did it entirely with class.

Ray Leonard, who publicly declares Hearn the winner of their rematch, said the only guy who never complained about being robbed that night was Tommy Hearn.

Condor says:

One last thing. Hearn's highlight reel 2nd round KO of Duran took place on free Saturday afternoon television (I believe CBS). The inflation rate of that fight today would be an 18 month build-up, NO tune-ups, establish a catch-weight, quarantine both guys, and a major PPV (with a

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worthless undercard). Back then, they signed on the line that was dotted and 4-6 weeks later, may the best man win. It's truly sad what things have become.

the Roast says:

Well said Condor, both posts.

Robert Curtis says:

Condor, you nailed it. Thanks for your post. So many smart folks here on TSS. I'm only a comedian and happy to be here!