January 2009 was the last time Mosley showed us more than a glimpse of the old "Sugar."

There was a certain odd symmetry to the way things ended for Shane Mosley and Winky Wright this week.

Both announced their retirement from boxing at the age of 40 on the same day. Both had recently lost one-sided bouts to far younger men, beaten as much by the calendar as the young men in front of them. Both had, at one time, been joined in that odd way two fighters become entwined when they challenge each other twice and one proves to be superior.

Yet what is oddest of all about their career arc is that Mosley will be rightly remembered as the better fighter and the more popular one yet it was Wright who twice defeated him when they were still in their prime or close to it. That is boxing for you, a sport where one man can simply be the endless nemesis of the other while never quite as good when facing different opponents or trying to please a crowd.

Last month Mosley lost every round to a 21-year-old champion who was the same age as his son. Apparently, that loss to Saul Alvarez made Mosley think when other defeats had not and he decided he'd had enough.

The winner of five world titles in three weight classes, Mosley was never better than when he was a lightweight. He had blinding speed at 135 pounds and withering power. Some compared him to Roberto Duran, although that always seemed like a reach because Duran may well have been the greatest lightweight in boxing history.

Yet even if he was not Duran, Mosley was special at that weight and still good enough to become a world champion later at both welterweight and junior middleweight. His mistake was that after first defeating Oscar De La Hoya by split decision in 2000 he thought that beating "the Man'' made him "the Man.'' As many fighters learn the hard way it did not.

Instead of accepting a big-money rematch he defended the welterweight title three times before running into a familiar nemesis, Vernon Forrest. Forrest had denied Mosley a spot on the Olympic team in 1992 and now 10 years later defeated him easily again, dropping him twice and badly cutting him with an accidental butt.

Instead of regrouping, he invoked an immediate rematch clause only to lose again but a year later he upset De La Hoya a second time in a decidedly controversial decision to win a junior middleweight title. Instead of accepting $8 million for an immediate rematch he listened to ill-informed advisor Judd Burstein and challenged the larger and exceedingly complicated

Wright to a unification fight.

Wright had long ago been dubbed “The International Man of Misery’’ by boxing publicist Fred Sternburg because for years he toiled in obscurity, fighting and winning around the world as a defensive master displeasing to American audiences but revered in Europe, where the taste for fisticuffs is more refined.

For five years, 1993-1998, Wright fought in eight different countries but seldom in the U.S. even after becoming a world champion. Mosley gave him a shot at something more and he took it, defeating him handily in their first fight and then winning a majority decision when Mosley repeated his mistake with Forrest and insisted upon an immediate rematch eight months later.

Wright (51-6-1, 25 KO) would never please American crowds but he was like fighting the matrix. His defensive prowess was well deserved and his offense came off that defense and did enough damage to twice win him the junior middleweight titles and send Felix Trinidad back into retirement by pitching a shutout against him.

Mosley (46-8-1, 39 KO) was, to be fair, both the superior fighter and the more pleasing one but he could not solve Wright and it seemed his career went into decline after that, especially after losing to Miguel Cotto three years later for the welterweight title. But like many of the best fighters, Mosley had one great night in him and it came on Jan. 24, 2009.

That night he destroyed the myth of Antonio Margarito when first his trainer Nazeem Richardson caught Margarito trying to wear loaded hand wraps, an act that would cause him a year’s suspension and a lifetime of shame. Mosley then beat him half to death for nine lopsided rounds before the fight was stopped with Margarito’s face unrecognizable from what it had been when the evening began.

That victory turned out to be a mirage. Shane Mosley never won again, finishing his career 0-3-1 over the next three years. He lost in lopsided fashion to Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Manny Pacquiao (no shame in that at his age), fought a desultory draw with Sergio Mora in between and then lost for the final time to Alvarez last month.

That last defeat to a kid half his age finally convinced Mosley of the obvious. Like many formerly great fighters he could still see the openings but they closed before he could react. He could still see the punches coming but he could no longer block them before they landed.

No shame in that. It is how it goes in boxing for everyone but the few who leave in time. The only shame actual of Mosley's likely Hall of Fame career came after the second De La Hoya fight when it came to light he'd used performance enhancing drugs the "clear'' and the "cream'' under the direction of disgraced former San Francisco-area supplement distributor Victor Conte and his own strength and conditioning coach, Darryl Hudson.

To this day Mosley insists he was duped and unknowing, although Conte and Hudson have argued otherwise. Regardless of the truth of Mosley's position, De La Hoya accepted him into his company as a partner for a time and they remain respectful after having been rivals dating back to their childhood days as amateur sensations around Los Angeles.

Mosley was never quite De La Hoya even though he beat him twice but he was one of the finest fighters of his time. Wright was never quite Mosley although he beat him twice and was certainly one of the best junior middleweights in the world for nearly a decade.

Such are the vagaries of boxing, a sport where as Mick Jagger might sing, 'You can't always get what you want but if you try some times, well, you just might find, you get what you need.''

If Mosley and Wright needed to make names for themselves in the difficult world of prize fighting they succeeded. Final defeat does not diminish their accomplishments even though Mosley was 0-3-1 in his final years and Wright lost his final three fights over a five year period in which he retired for three years before coming back to be beaten last weekend by up-and-coming prospect Peter "Kid Chocolate'' Quillin (26-0) in a fight in which he lost nearly every round.

Waiting for him in his locker room at the Home Depot Center in Carson, CA. after it was over was his old friend and foil, Shane Mosley. They were together one last time, friends and aging warriors upon whom boxing had turned its back as it always does.

Mosley now says he will train his young son and try to build his own promotional company in California. Wright intends to play golf and watch his money wisely with the help of long-time friend, Jim Wilkes, a successful Florida attorney who directed much of his career.

Two great boxers had come to the end of their time inside the ring the way nearly every prize fighter does. They had been defeated by time but raise their hands up one last time for all they achieved because when they were young and strong and fast they made a mark that will be remembered.

Comment on this article

tlig says:

I don't know why the story about Mosley refusing a third match with DLH (for big money) and instead going in against Wright still persists. He was never offered the fight with DLH (who, not only was worried about losing again but was cross at losing a fight many felt he won). DLH, his reps at the time and even Mosley have said several times he was never offered the fight. What I seem to recall was him talking hypothetically about a rematch in an interview on some credibility-deficient website ("you heard it here first") and those guys ran with it. DLH rarely offers immediate rematches anyway.

Radam G says:

But for a sec, Mosley and Wright will stay retired. They ain't got the cojones to walk away and stay away like the "Marvelous One." And ya' kno' dat, babbbeeee!

"The older the bull, the stronger the horn." I know that maxim for OLDIES GOLDIES with big egos. Muthasuckas are going to watch some pugilists of the nowadays bulljoke era of New Jack, Straight Whack, and Toilet Stool, and Old Sugar Shane and Winky will sing like two birds to the world: "I'm bringing back Old School."

"These young guns lack most of the sweet science's whup-a$$ tools. They look like a bunch of fools. They are stinkin' da game up like their arses have all just come outta cesspools."

Beside old B-Hop[py] will still be around kicking young a$$. So will Holy, if he doesn't get thrown in da can. And Winky and Shane will get hyped up and wanna join the Senior Circuit Party Tour. Hehehehe! Holla!

deepwater says:

mosley beat cheato because his wife jin sent him divorce papers during camp. mosley got with a new piece right after so he got comfy again.

the Roast says:

Shane Mosley got me to TSS. Most of my close friends had given up on boxing. The night Shane beat Margarito I had no one to call and say "did you see that?!?" I fired up the computer, did a search on Mosley-Margarito and ended up here. I read alot that night. What a great place, full of boxing loving nuts just like me. Dusted off an old nickname from my late 80's basketball days and the Roast was reborn. Thanks for getting me here Shane, without that stunning win I might not have ever found TSS.

brownsugar says:

sounds like good memories Roast, and after 2 years or so,.. I still don't know what your moniker means,.. Don't tell me, like a good story,.. leave some parts to the readers imagination.

I was impressed with Winky's last showing, someone here commented on how solid Wink looked, (not great, or impressive, but fairly decent). 40 years old and 5 years off, he performed way better than I expected, He came into the fight thinking he could win. Having found out the truth about himself he chose to quit rather than ride out his career taking second billing.
It's time to celebrate when great boxers know when to quit.