

What about Claressa Shields?

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Sunday, 07 October 2012 19:43



Colbert knows what rates. He had Claressa Shields on Sept. 25. But to be real, there probably should have been more of a hubbub surrounding Shields' gold medal, and her skills. She deserves better, and more.

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It's Saturday night, and not just any. Tonight is fight night at the McCarson household. My wife and I have the popcorn and drinks ready, and we're sitting on the couch. We're watching Andre Ward fight Chad Dawson on HBO. It's one of the biggest fights of the year, and it's on regular HBO, not PPV.

All is right in the boxing world.

During the telecast, HBO analyst Max Kellerman says something I agree with. He says Andre Ward is the last American boxer to win a gold medal.

But Max and I are wrong.

My wife turns to me with a look of almost-horror on her face. I wonder if I've spilled something on the couch or said something stupid, but no, it's what Max said.

"What about Claressa?" she says. And she's right. What about Claressa?

I see from Twitter that Claressa is thinking the same exact thing. I don't know Kellerman personally, but having been around him a few times at fights, I know enough to think he didn't mean it that way. Kellerman is the type of guy who talks and takes pictures with fans for as long as they want him to be there. He smiles and seems genuinely interested in what people have to say to him when they talk, and he doesn't hurry off when he's approached by someone. He makes eye contact, smiles and chats it up with them like it matters, because he knows it does.

He's just made a mistake.

The two connect and Max apologizes to her. He says it's his mistake, congratulates her and tells her she's made everyone proud. The only problem is that he says this to her via Twitter

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where only a few people can see, and what he said on HBO that night was to millions of fight fans who might not have been sitting next to someone like my wife to let them know he's wrong – *we're* wrong.

Max and I are wrong because we operate under that same stodgy old paradigm that's been in place for years: it's had its moments, but for the most part, women's boxing is just a sideshow.

Life Goes On

Honestly, I never really think about the series of events again until I'm talking to Claressa this week. I set up an interview with her publicist and make the call. She answers herself, probably tired after a long day from being at school. She's a senior at Flint Northwestern High School in Michigan, just a kid really. Over the summer, she carried on her shoulders the hopes and dreams of women everywhere, but now she's back to carrying normal things like school books.

For some reason, I'm nervous talking to her.

I ask Claressa what it's like being an Olympic champion. I've talked to all sorts of fighters and sports figures before, but never a reigning gold medalist and most certainly not one as important as her.

"When you first win the gold medal, it's so special," she tells me. "It was my dream for so many years, and now I've accomplished my dream."

It's always nice to hear stories like this, so I'm genuinely excited to listen to it firsthand. But then she continues.

"Then, for like a week or so, I was like 'what's next?'" she says. "You know, after having the same dream so many times and then one day you lay down and you have the same dream but you wake up and you've got the gold medal wrapped around you, you get to thinking...why I am

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still having that dream? I already made it a reality, you know?"

It is at this point I start to think about Kellerman and that look on my wife's face. Claressa keeps talking.

"I'll definitely continue boxing," she says. "The Olympics were just the first step. I still feel like I need to get my recognition. You know? I felt like I would get more recognition because I'm seventeen and I won the gold medal, but I didn't."

The knife begins to go in, but I don't really feel it yet.

"It just seems like a women's gold medal isn't as valuable as a man's gold medal. I don't know..."

It is at this point that it hits me. We've failed her. I've failed her. Max has failed her. *We. Have. All. Failed. Her.*

Claressa comes from some rough stuff. She's endured it, and she's come out a better person for it. She's only seventeen, but she's wise in the way people who have to crawl from the bottom to the top are, and besides, nobody with the nickname "T-Rex" let's little things like recognition get them down. If she did, she would've never started boxing in the first place.

Claressa's father, Clarence Shields, was an amateur fighter nicknamed "Cannonball" because of his fast, hard punches. When Claressa first asked her dad if she could learn to box, he told her boxing was a man's sport. Max and I would have probably told her the same thing; I know I probably would have. But Claressa kept at it anyway until, at eleven years old, her father finally gave in to her, thinking she'd surely get beat up and quit.

She didn't.

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“I’m not really the type of person to think ‘oh I wish I had this, oh I wish I had that’”, she says. “I just accept what I have and just make the best out of it.”

Claressa is a fighter.

A Real Boxer

Claressa is old school tough. She watches fight films of the greats and she emulates them. She considers herself a mash-up of Joe Louis and Ray Robinson. She tells me during one of her first matches in London, she heard someone compare her to Sylvester Stallone’s fictional movie character, Rocky Balboa.

This offends her.

“Someone called me Rocky Balboa!” she says. “In my first fight at the Olympics, I was throwing a lot of punches...I was like...that’s an insult! He’s not even *a real boxer*. I was like NO, I do not box like him!”

Claressa tells me that in her first fight, her opponent’s strategy forced her to throw wider punches than normal. She says she knew she could land her hook, but in the first couple rounds she was missing by a few inches here and there, so she just kept throwing it. In the rest of her fights, she says she got back to what she does best.

“I was throwing wide punches [in that fight] but the next day, I was throwing sharp punches which is how I usually box,” she says. “I make them miss, and then I make them pay! That’s when you can see how much skill I have.”

Claressa says she looks up to the old school fighters and this doesn’t surprise me. She says

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she watches tapes of her idols, Joe Louis and Ray Robinson, the most, and that she has The Brown Bomber's powerful left hook and a sweet, straight right like Sugar's.

I tell her I've heard her compared to Marvin Hagler, and she laughs almost giddily and says what anyone would say to something like that.

"He was pretty good, too!"

A Brave New World

There has never been a Claressa Shields before. She's new territory in boxing. Sure, we've had women boxers before, but we've never had a seventeen-year-old gold medalist who grows up immersed in the sport's amateur ranks like she's been. We've not had a girl who watches black and white film of the best fighters ever and then puts what she sees to use.

Claressa didn't have someone like her to look up to, either. No one did. I ask her if she truly understands who and what she is, and what she'll forever be to every girl who ever grows up in the United States wanting to be a boxer.

"It's very special to be looked at as an inspiration," she says, but she says it in a way that doesn't give me the impression we've helped her understand how important she really is. This is where Max and I (and you) come back in.

You see, boxing is for everyone, and it's at its very best when it combines the truth of tough, gritty and skilled competition with the mythologizing poetry of storytelling. It's not that we make them to be more than they really are, rather we describe them in the most honest way we can. *Gods of War*, as Springs Toledo calls them, the best of the very best.

Claressa deserves to be part of that.

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Her narrative is one of newness and hope. It's something rare and unbelievable. It's different. It's special. She's a pioneer of a sport that's been around for centuries. She's Amelia Earhart. She's Jackie Robinson. She's Billy Jean King. She's Jack Johnson.

What about Claressa? Let's give her the credit she's due. She deserves it. It's says something about us, the boxing community, that she hasn't gotten it, and it's something I don't like. Let's be better than that. Let's rally around Claressa and all the other women who want to be treated as real fighters. Let's make Claressa the show, not the sideshow. Let's demand Golden Boy Promotions, Top Rank and Main Events start beating down her door to sign her the way they would've a man. Let's demand Everlast and Grant to fight each other for her endorsement. I want her on the cover of Ring Magazine. I want Monday columns from BWAA members about her. Dan Rafael should be buddying up to her on Twitter, and Jim Lampley should be prepping for his extensive interview with her on HBO's next installment of "The Fight Game."

Boxing should take care of its own.

For now, Claressa has no idea what she'll do next. She says she's already back in the gym training, and that she's already got a fight lined up next week in a PAL tournament. She's a fighter, she says. It's what she does.

"So I've been thinking about the next Olympics," she tells me. "If I get *two* gold medals, there's no way they cannot give [the recognition] to me then, right?"

I am not sure I know the answer to her question, and my heart breaks because of it. So should yours.

[Comment on this article](#)

ali says:

Hands down Claressa Shields is the best female fighter ive ever seen.

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Radam G says:

She's aight! SCLA Ali, you are down with any dame who's packing much back. And that is real Jack! So watch Jill, or dude would be sneaking up that hill. And not for a pail of water. He will have a 40 ounce and cheat wine and trying to get old girl straight up drunk. Hehe! Holla!

ali says:

Radam stop being a damn hater there has never been a 17 year old female fighter as talented as shields.

deepwater says:

Wow this writer is off his medications or needs to be locked up for emotional hysteria . Seriously this writers comments represents the collective evil that has been the enemy of mankind."It is at this point that it hits me.* We've failed her.* I've failed her. **Max has failed her.* We. Have. All. Failed. Her. *" seriously ? You stupid idiot writer trying to blame a bunch of hysterical nonsense on himself,on every boxing fan,on you, on me. Hey emo writer hear me loud and hear my clear. Shut the f up and think. Think you weasel . How f ing dare you. Women's boxing is new to the USA you stupid clown. It takes time for it to take. Katie Taylor is a hero in Ireland because she has been promoted professionally in her country for years before her gold medal. USA boxing is garbage to both men and women divisions since 1992 . Hey writer why don't you and your wife go to where calisa lives,rip her out of high school and write her a check. Since.you.failed.her. Why don't you give her a job since.you.failed.her. It's up to Carissa what happens in her future. It's up to her. She can be a bigger star then she is now if she keeps boxing or she can go to college or both. She is young but.you.failed.her.already.so.she.has.no.future. Your heart breaks because she might win another gold.I have to stop here because I am at work. You sir never got in the ring and should not write about boxing. Shields is great great female boxer and will get the recognition based on her fights. Clowns like this writer talk about knives going in when we should be talking about some prime opponants from other countries she can match up against. Taylor had her russian, Amir khan had the Cuban foe.

Resza says:

First off, thank you for this article! One thing deepwater is correct about is that I Claressa Shields control my own destiny! But if I was male my life would be totally different. I'm the one taking punches just like the males. Performing at my best and displaying great skill. It shouldn't matter that I'm 17 with a Gold medal on how the world accepts me. Women's boxing is not new to America! Women's boxing is new to the Olympics! America didn't even display my gold medal match on TV! But the men were showed. So learn some facts dude. Really. This guy is right. Katie Taylor did not box profession in Ireland! Her country just supported her matches against other women. Plus she displayed great skill as I did! I was showed on tv n London! So this is very sad. I'm the only boxer to get a gold out of boxing this Olympics. I was the last one standing. I'm a great boxer and all great boxers male or female deserve recognition.

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deepwater says:

[QUOTE=Resza;20788]First off, thank you for this article! One thing deepwater is correct about is that I Claressa Shields control my own destiny! But if I was male my life would be totally different. I'm the one taking punches just like the males. Performing at my best and displaying great skill. It shouldn't matter that I'm 17 with a Gold medal on how the world accepts me. Women's boxing is not new to America! Women's boxing is new to the Olympics! America didn't even display my gold medal match on TV! But the men were showed. So learn some facts dude. Really. This guy is right. Katie Taylor did not box professional in Ireland! Her country just supported her matches against other women. Plus she displayed great skill as I did! I was showed on tv n London! So this is very sad. I'm the only boxer to get a gold out of boxing this Olympics. I was the last one standing. I'm a great boxer and all great boxers male or female deserve recognition.[/QUOTE] you are a great boxer. congrats for doing what no man from the usa could. katie taylor does not box professional but she has been winning titles and has been promoted professionally.meaning her team has been spreading the word with interviews ,posters and other advertising for years before the olympics. there are katie taylor posters in every pub in ireland. she also had the rivalry with the russian. my advice to you would be something a guy yelled from the stands during a fight. DO IT AGAIN BABY! please do not turn pro yet because there is no competition. womens boxing is new to usa and you are the first champ.the props will come keep up the good work. do not blame the fans for anything because we pay to watch good fights man or women. the fans did not fail you. usa boxing corporation failed you if anything, they are a joke organization and you won because of you and despite the lack of marketing. get a marketing advisor and start giving speeches to kids at schools because you are an inspiration. 2 time olympic gold medalist will be good to hear.

deepwater says:

and womens boxing is new to the usa. girls were allowed in the ny gloves in 96 compared to mens boxing which has been since the first olympics. most people know about women boxing from christy martin and st john and bad *** ann wolfe. thats pretty much what the average joe knows. you know shields ,as a pioneer, things dont go smooth but it will only be that much better when you get your due. nbc did a crap job, usa boxing did a crap job, the international refs did a crap job but please do not blame fans we did not fail you. maybe the author of this article failed you but not the fans.

Radam G says:

You are such a phony, SCLA Ali! Don't be pretending that I hate C Shields or female boxing. You just don't know syet about da game. As Ressa said, "Women boxing is not to new to America." There have been those around that was 17 years old and as good as she, but there was O Games for 'em.

You knuckleheaded chameleon and self-proclaimed adversary of the one-and-only Radam G, I sit on the lap of the late, great Lady Ali of boxing in the mid-to-late 1970s. You don't have a clue what her name was. You, yourself, cut out the hatin.' muthasucka 'cause ya can't be relatin!'

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I'm certain that Ressa is going to become one of the baddest P4P boxing champion of all times -- female or male. And that's REAL. And wif it, ya DEAL! Holla!

deepwater says:

hey shields send me a private email. the editor has it. Someone in south florida has a whole ad campaign for you. he has connections with motown and boxing. you probably know him. usa boxing does not like him so you know its a good thing.

kmcc505 says:

I wasn't going to comment on this being the author, but since Claressa has chimed in, so will I.

Deepwater,

I'll ignore all the insults you slung at me in order to stay on topic. The point of this article is that I believe it is up to us, the boxing community (so yes the fans, but even moreso the writers, promotional companies, equipment companies, etc.) to give Claressa her due, and by extension women's boxing.

Women have been fighting a long time. There were have been women boxers since way before 1996. The fact that some organization didn't have women's boxing in it until 1996 is exactly my point.

NBC did not air her match. Not only that, they didn't even include her (on any other women boxers) in their big montage of important women's moments in the 2012 Olympics. That's ridiculous.

What's equally ridiculous though, and perhaps even more ridiculous, is how we in boxing don't take care of our own in the first place. Researching articles about Claressa for my interview, I found very little out there bout her which I found strange, being as she is one of the first 3 gold medalists in history. Basically, I found pre-Olympic articles, then the updates, then that she won and that's basically it.

In boxing, we make heroes of our sport more than any other sport perhaps, and in this case we have an actual hero (both for her country and for women's boxing) and she comes back to a mere pat on the back.

You and Claressa are right about it being up to her. I'm a staunch advocate of personal accountability. However, she deserves more than she's gotten so let's use OUR personal accountability to make sure she gets the attention and accolades she deserves.

Oh, and I do not have any advice or preference to whether she turns pro or stays an amatuer. The point is I would hope she gets the opportunity any man might get having just done the same thing she did. Might it be bettter for her and the sport to stay amatuer like Katie Taylor has done? Sure. I'm all for it. Might it be just as good for her to become a pro and carry the torch

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into the professional ranks? Sure. I'm all for it.

I would encourage you to use your apparent passion for the sport in more constructive ways in the future. I'm still not sure what you're exactly so angry about. If you don't agree with what I said, then don't agree. But I'm being honest in everything I think about it, and really I'd rather not have had to admit a lot of it.

Peace.

SouthPaul says:

Good read. Good timing. A day of female boxer discovery possibly for some folks.

I'd be curious to know what her publicist is doing to get her name out there. What's the exact business/career plan? Any endorsement offers whatsoever, Claressa? Have you and your team reached out to any of the boxing promoters? Given any thought to reaching out to Fladdy Cent to possibly join up with his new boxing venture?

deepwater says:

I am angry as a boxing fan for being blamed for anything that hasnt have to do with me.Dont you dare blame any fans because we pay for boxing. we give you a job. no fans=no sport. I do agree that shield got the short end of the stick but blame the people that call the shots. do not blame me. blame the aiba, blame corrupt usa boxing, blame the lack of marketing, blame the people that should be doing their job, blame the nbc program director.blame the nbc broadcast team for getting kicked out of the arena.blame the mens team for not showing up.blame yourself for not writing good articles on her. blame yourself and the people that are responsible. not.me.or.any.other.fans. I know 2 big dogs that will love to handle shields promotions. motown music plus proper boxing will make \$\$\$.

deepwater says:

evryone knew katie taylor a year or more before the games. why? i guess ireland just like women better then usa. not. everyone knew of her because she had a good team around her that hyped her years before the games. interviews,articles,posters in every pub,music videos. no one in usa knew shields or any of the other guys on the mens team before the games. no one even knew marcus brown was from ny at the bar i watched the fight. USA BOXING IS A CRAP OUTFIT. blame them. come to nyc shileds. set up boxing on the deck of the intrepid or on the pier on 14 st. visit hospitals and schools. book appearences on tv shows. a closed mouth dont get fed.

kmcc505 says:

Got it. Everyone else's fault. Thanks.

kmcc505 says:

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Boxing is what we all make of it. I wasn't calling out any one group specifically. I'm saying we ALL need to do a better job. If you want to be exempt from it, then by all means consider yourself exempt.

deepwater says:

who is all? me ,you the cab driver, the postman. instead of blaming all blame those responsible. so now the fans on this website have to do a better job? this is what got me angry. I watch all fights including woman fights. if i put an avatar of shields does that mean im doing a better job>? and if I dont put an avatar its all my fault that nbc didnt show her fight????

deepwater says:

I didnt blame everyone I blamed the people responsible. you know maybe your right.its all my fault shields isnt getting props. you know I told my friends to watch marry kom outta india,taylor out of ireland, the italian heavy, john joe the bareknuckle family guy frrom ireland, lomenchenko from ukraine. i tried telling people about marcus brown and rashee plus shields but all i got was who? so yes its all my fault I didnt do a good job. I take responsibility and will do my best. I will stand on the corner with a sign. who is marketing her and why have they not been fired if they even exist!!!! you think delahoya just won the gold and poof instant fame? delahoya had a professional marketing team b4 the oylmpics!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

kmcc505 says:

I wasn't trying to offend you with my article. I was trying to get people in the boxing community to throw their support behind Claressa because I think she deserves it, and I was recounting my personal epiphany as someone who is part of the boxing community. I apologize if it came off any other way.

Ha! Next time, I'll say "everyone but deepwater".

kathy658 says:

This deepwater dude is so not not deep. But he is a very angry person and apparently likes to be divisive and pick fights. Sir please quit posting silly argumentative stuff you are now boring me.

I have to say I didn't know anything about this fighter. Well I don't follow boxing to the extent of others more rabid fans I do have an interest in female boxers. I would have made it a point to follow/watch this fighter. Having been allowed to spar with my brothers when I was a kid some 40 years ago I do appreciate the art of boxing. And it is a sport that women can do as well as men.

I had the pleasure of knowing some of the female boxers from the San Antonio area. Some of them are excellent fighters. But most of them are treated like they are eye candy for the sport. The ones that were very pretty got the most air time whether they were good or not. They were

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not taken seriously. And I do agree that if we don't look for or search for good talent then we are part of the problem. Now I not being in the boxing world had no idea we had such a great female fighter going for the gold. That is the sad part. This fighter or others like her should not be ignored. I will do my part to make mention of her and her accomplishments and hope this article helps others do the same.

Thanks for the information!

deepwater says:

apology accepted. I want her to do well also. if I offended you with my salty words then I am sorry. my comment sure did alot of work. I got the author to comment as well as the first female gold medal winner outta USA. give me my own column on here!

kmcc505 says:

haha i know. This has turned into an epic thread. EPIC. Enjoyed it.

deepwater says:

"Well I don't follow boxing to the extent " I stopped right there. do some research before you make your second post maam

SouthPaul says:

Interesting exchange. The author writes a fun little article ..gets verbally abused and attacked yet he's the one apologizing. Lmao. Bet it gets frustrating taking the high road as a writer, commentator, or whatever it be in this sport. Most every one is under the false idea you're banging out the big bucks... You know little to knowing about the sport you cover all because you likely haven't laced 'em up on a professional level. I have no doubt if you sat Larry Merchant or Max Kellerman down with the average pro fighter these days...they the fighter would schooled in a nice history lesson. I'd even wager both those cats might even teach a thing or 2 in terms of which combo punches to throw. Seriously. The exchange between Floyd and Merchant? Floyd's a master inside the ring but Larry would school him in every other aspect of life and could teach him a plenty about the sweet science. Think what I am getting at..and ain't trying to offend anyone in particular but being a pro fighter don't automactially make you know it all in the sweet science.

brownsugar says:

Nice comments SP,.... But I don't think Larry could teach Floyd much of anything about boxing inside or outside the ropes ... Floyds right.... Boxers do make the best commentators.

However.. Larry is a competent journalist/announcer...and he has earned a place of appreciation with the fans.. his rambling soliloquies about the sweet science..have become a fixture in the sport , often vaguely philosiphizing about the cause and effect of what we just

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witnessed. ..sometimes in eloquent fashion... sometimes falling just a bit short like a 75 year old man struggling to enterpret the music and manner of young people.
Still, Merchant is Merchant,.. he's earned the right not to be perfect.

[B]But back to Claressa[/B],..

She's obviously as concise and efficient in the forums as she is in the ring.

Claressa reminds me of what happened to me Last Monday Night...

I had huge expenses the previous week and had to literally put a quarantine on my wallet. No dollars could be allowed to exit from my bank cards untill the next direct deposit hit a few days later. (couldn't afford to take a chance on any overdrafts or bounced checks etc...) ... and My girl was also similarly tapped.

I made an involuntary choice to stay at home in an effort to prevent any frivolous spending. so I resigned myself to spending a quiet evening at home.

While sorting thru some old mail that was gradually piling up on the nightstand I found 2 Walmart give cards in the amount of \$25 dollars eachThat's a GOL-Dang grand total of \$50 WHOPPING WALMART BUCKS!!!!... My job had mailed them to me back in April 2012....and I thought it was junk mail..

I told my girl friend to get dressed "were going out on a spending spree". Yeah I know, \$25 ain't much,.. and Walmart is not the most fabulous place to spend it.

But we had the most fun we ever had, spending that little bit of money as if it was pieces of gold,..There's nothing more fun than finding surprise Gold when you least expect it.

That What Claressa reminds me of...

When the Men failed to capture any gold in what used to be one of our most prestigious events,.. It felt like a blow to our national pride.

I don't even like womens boxing,.. and rarely watch it.

But When Claressa won the gold, it kindled the Spark of pride for our team that I have been holding in reserve since Ward won it in 2004.

Claressa's win ignited the hope that there are still outstanding, achievers and overcoming amateurs left in the sport of boxing.

Claressa's win.....It's like finding that winning pick3 Lotter ticket a week later after you thought you threw it in the trash.

Claressa single handedly restored my hope in US Amateur boxing... and prevented me from losing faith in our amateur program altogether...

And for that effort Claressa I am truly thankful.

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Professional Women Boxers look-out, there's gonna be a new sheriff in town.

yes.....It's gonna be mean ... 2016!!!

SouthPaul says:

Classic Walmart story. Lmao