Boxing fans were hit hard by the news that three-division champion Hector Camacho was shot in Puerto Rico, and was on life support.

I think it's a good time to focus on sunnier times, and remember what an off-the-chart talent and prospect he was, and also recall that in his prime, Camacho was a near-great.

Hector Camacho's career record is 79-6-3 (38). In 88 fights he fought every up and comer, contender, pretender, champion and great between the years 1980-1997, and was never stopped once. Former Camacho opponents Julio Cesar Chavez, Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad, Howard Davis, Ray Mancini, Rafael Limon, Cornelius Boza-Edwards, Edwin Rosario, Jose Luis Ramierz, Roberto Duran and Sugar Ray Leonard can't say they've never been stopped. Even current pound-for-pound terror Manny Pacquiao cannot say that.

Camacho in 1980 was no doubt one of the best prospects I've ever seen, along with Tony Ayala and Mike Tyson. I was more impressed with the young Camacho on the way up than I've been with anyone since the young Roberto Duran. Hector had it all physically and his skill-set was remarkable. What we didn't know was he'd evolve into a lazy fighter who wouldn't take his training or career seriously. He was also very tough mentally and physically but his outside the

ring life and the crowd he ran with eventually hindered him and kept him from realizing his full potential.

What most observers miss about Hector Camacho was he came into the pros already fully formed. In his first fight, he probably could've competed for the the world title. He had perfect balance from any position regardless of how his feet were set and always seemed to force his opponents to punch from their blindside. He also had a perfect sense of distance and knew exactly where the ropes were at every second, he even knew where he was in the round.

He punched hard enough to get the job done and to disrupt his opponents' aggression and was nearly flawless defensively. Hector also had an abundance of ring strength. He could tie up anybody on the inside if he was in trouble, at least in part because of his strength. Elusive fighters are seldom thought to be strong, but Hector was the exception. He very seldom was knocked out of position by a single shot or was punched around the ring even by some of the legitimately bigger and stronger fighters he fought.

Camacho was no altar boy and already knew how to fight dirty and was a master at holding and hitting. He also had a genuine mean streak in him and was an ultimate front funner. Hector was also lightning fast, but with none of the wasted motion that most of today's young speedsters can't resist showing off. His one-twos were a blur and he could throw solid uppercuts and hooks while retreating and moving off to the side.

We didn't even have to find out about his chin (which turned out to be first tier) until the Rosario fight---he'd never been tested in any way even though he'd been fighting good guys. Camacho was a very tough guy, when you take into account what a screwup he's always been. Most lazy fighters like that eventually start quitting in fights, but he never has, not even against Chavez, De La Hoya, or Trinidad. He could easily have bailed in any of those; he had no chance of winning any of them. On the other hand, if he'd taken his career seriously, he would have mostly likely been thought of as being in their league when his career was over.

Sadly, like James Toney his weight ballooned up after fights and a majority of his training camps were committed to losing weight and reducing instead of sharpening up and refining his skill and craft. Sometimes Camacho would let himself go so much that it looked as if he was getting in shape during the actual bout. And by the time there were some real challenges for him in the divisions between 135/147, he was already lazy and just going through the motions and became somewhat of a trial horse and stepping stone.

Like with other past near greats, boxing came almost too easy for Hector Camacho as he took his talent and skill for granted. Therefore he never was consistent and had too many gaps in between looking great and then looking tired and disinterested. Because of his persistent use of illicit substances, and suspect choices of companions, Camacho was, sadly, destined to become a near great and flame out before his time.

However, let's remember the terrific talent he was back in the day, and that there was a time Camacho was seen as the next truly great fighter on the horizon.

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Comment on this article

Radam G says:

It's MACHO TIME! On the other side of this topsy-turvy existence. Hey Saint Peter, you know that Hector is going to check to see if those pearls on the Pearly Gates are legit. And pocketing too many, Hector. See YA when I get there. And we are gonna get on our MACHO TIME and PINOY TIME grove! My deepest condolence to the Mama Maria and all of the C Fam. Holla!

tlig says:

Sad career, even sadder life. The guy had talent but not to the extent people are starting to make out. His fights post-Rosario were awful (and that's being kind). He was tough no doubt but he was also safety-first a lot of the time which helped he avoid getting KO'd. You can even make an argument for him not winning a single round in three fights he had (against Chavez, Trinidad and DLH). He would talk the talk but get in the ring and run and hug until the crowd was dizzy. Shame how he went out but the truth is he always hung out with the wrong crowd and in the wrong place.

gibola says:

Post-Howard Davis (May 87) was a post-peak Camacho, other than the courage he showed in hanging in with heavier guys in fights he couldn't win, I don't really care about the Trinidad, ODLH defeats. I remember the 130-135lb Camacho as the 'real' Camacho. That Camacho was so good he would have been competitive with anybody at that weight class in recent times. Present-day comment may not suggest it but Camacho would have been favoured over Chavez Sr in 85/86 and had they fought it would have been pick'em in my view. Sadly the real Camacho

disappeared by the time he fought Reyes Cruz and Mancini (88/89) never to be seen again (tho the Vinny Paz fight was solid). He was never a welterweight and his indiscipline ruined a potentially great career. However, when his star shone it dazzled the boxing landscape and it is that Camacho I will remember. Goodbye Hector, thanks for the memories.

Radam G says:

The videos of all the talent Hector fought and beat, speak for themselves. There will forever be haters. And they cannot do ___ ___ ___ but talk that talk. Holla!

ali says:

I've never been a fan of Hector Camacho but I have to give him his credit he was an all-great. For him to have fought all of those great fighters and never been stopped is incredible (reminds me of James Toney) R.I.P to another legend.