

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16



Let's hear it for the losers, the brave few who know not when to quit. They trudge towards danger, with nary a hesitation, marching to the beat of inevitable decline. When everyone else in the arena begins to doubt them (the audience, the referee, the commentators, their own corner) they still believe they can win, even when they can't. They will not give up.

Look closely now as he ricochets off the ropes, or rises sullenly from the blue canvas for the third time, or throws punches at ghosts because his balance has been beaten askew. He is a real life Rocky Balboa, a hero to be praised and admired, even if he must ultimately be saved from himself in the end. Because in real life, we all know Rocky doesn't win.

The Real Deal

No one would call Evander Holyfield a loser. Arguably the greatest cruiserweight in the short history of the divisions' existence, Holyfield went on to also become one of the most decorated heavyweights of the twentieth century. What few seem to remember these days, though, is that the pinnacle of praise he received during his first heavyweight title reign (1990-1992) was the very night he lost the crown to Riddick Bowe.

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16

Holyfield had won the title in 1990 with a lightning quick counterpunch to the jaw of Buster Douglas. At 246 pounds, Douglas wasn't nearly the same guy who had shocked Mike Tyson in Tokyo the previous winter, but that wasn't Evander's fault. Tougher-than-expected tussles with 42-year-olds George Foreman and Larry Holmes, combined with Holyfield's inability to get Mike Tyson in the ring with him before the latter was sent to prison after being convicted of rape, left the public clamoring for the champion to inspire.

Enter Riddick Bowe. Despite being undefeated at the time, the giant-sized heavyweight was long known as an exceptionally skilled fighter who just didn't seem to focus enough, both inside the ring and out. On fight night, though, instead of the guy Holyfield had become accustomed to getting the better of during their numerous sparring sessions, Bowe entered the ring focused and in fantastic condition. After building an early point lead, Bowe started round ten of the scheduled twelve-rounder with a stiff, powerful jab that snapped Holyfield's head back. Seconds later, the two stood chest-to-chest.

Here they are...

Bowe snaps Holyfield's head up in the air like a jack-in-the-box with an earth shattering uppercut that has the champion momentarily out on his feet. Back to the post, Bowe batters him. Pow! Pow! Pow! There would surely be a knockout soon. Holyfield is staggering, covering up, stumbling. Bowe is throwing punches, bomb after bomb. Bam! Bam! Bam!

Slowly, though, the moment seems to turn. First, Holyfield shoots a straight right hand that does little except to prove he's still there. Next, he's bouncing on his toes again. Seconds later, Bowe misses the same uppercut that started things for him, then Holyfield digs back with a hard left hook to the body. How is this guy up? They separate for a moment. Holyfield is bouncing again, and he bounces his way right into delivering a hard right hand. This one has real force behind it though it is partially blocked. Another hook to the body has Bowe trying to catch his breath. Bowe has stopped throwing punches now. Is he hurt? Holyfield lures him back in close. Two vicious uppercuts are unfurled inside, but this time from the champion. It's Bowe's head snapping toward the sky now, rising to the lights like a balloon. It's Bowe who is in trouble. Moments later, a looping right hand punctuates the moment. And another. Another. They fight after the bell. Toe to toe. Holyfield is still there...somehow...he is still standing. He is still the champion, if only for a few more rounds.

When the judges read the scorecards after the full twelve, it confirmed what everyone already

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16

knew. Bowe had won the fight that night; Holyfield, the glory.

Four Seconds

Brilliance in defeat isn't localized to going the distance. Floyd Patterson didn't last more than a round with Sonny Liston either time he faced him, but that's only because he was brave enough not to. When the two met for the first time in 1962, Liston was the heavy favorite. Still, when the bell rang that night no one expected to witness the third fastest one round knockout in boxing history. Liston appeared all things important as soon as the punches started flying: he was bigger, meaner, stronger. Patterson's edge in speed and resiliency wasn't enough for him to overcome any of it, especially the pulverizing, deliberately delivered double left hooks to his head that sent the champion down to the floor for good.

After the fight, Patterson showed he was beaten more than just physically. He was devastated emotionally as well, embarrassed to the point of donning dark glasses and a fake beard so as not to be noticed on his way out of town. Few could have blamed him for never fighting anyone again, much less the very same monster who had pounded him down to challenger status just ten months earlier. Still, just fighting Liston again wasn't as commendable as the way in which he fought him, despite finding himself in similar hopelessness just seconds into the fray.

Here he comes now...

As in the first bout, Liston batters Patterson to the canvas in the very first round, except this time, even faster. He is ferocious, this giant, bear-sized man with the battering ram jab. Patterson is still conscious and rises to his feet. He meets the menacing Liston head on. Soon Patterson is getting shoved into the corner by short, heavy punches. Next, he catches a long, looping right hand telephone pole to the chin. He's down again. His mind drifts.

Down there on the floor, he is thinking about what will happen to him when he gets back up. He knows who and what is waiting for him should he rise to his feet. The reality of the situation has already been proven to him over and over and over. You can see it on his face, but you can see something more there, too. There is grit. There is glory.

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16

Floyd Patterson stands up with a look that is at once both resigned and resolute. He bites down hard on his mouthpiece, moves forward towards the most menacing puncher the world had ever seen and throws a one-two punch combination as hard as he can. This is Floyd Patterson. This is bravery.

Unflinchingly brave, as boxing writer Matt McGrain put it in his [excellent treatise](#) on the fighter, and at the end of things he had earned a total of four more seconds with Liston than he had lasted previously. Four glorious seconds.

A Real Prizefighter

Moments such as these are not limited to all-time great in epic main event struggles. Last weekend's Showtime Extreme card included junior middleweights Julian Williams and Jeremiah Wiggins. Both are unknown quantities for the most part. No one has any idea whether either of them will amount to anything, except that the bout was set up by promoters for the 22-year-old, undefeated prospect Williams to prove his mettle against 31-year-old tough trial horse Wiggins. He did just that and seemed to outclass Wiggins at every turn, save one.

While Wiggins was getting battered here and there, up and down, pillar to post, by the faster, stronger and younger Williams, and while he appeared dazed and even out on his feet on occasion, he seldom took a step backward from the tremendous onslaught he was up against in almost every moment. That's not to say he was foolish or without skill; he wasn't. This was not a case of a man taking a beating. We are not sadists.

Wiggins was simply a real prizefighter in a real fight. He was hopelessly outmatched, yes, but every single time it looked as if he was about to be stopped, wildly brave Wiggins would unleash a multitude of punches, some landing and some not, with furious intent. It was the case when the bell rang to begin the fight. It remained such after Wiggins was dumped to the canvas in round four. Wiggins wanted to win, he *needed* it, and he truly believed he could do it.

The bell rings for round seven now...

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16

Wiggins meets Williams in the center of the ring. His chin tucked behind his front, left shoulder, he probes out towards his assailant with a quick jab. Williams returns a couple jabs of his own, which land softly on Wiggins' body. The two take turns chasing each other a bit, then Wiggins shoves Williams to the ropes. Time to go to work. Wiggins lets loose a left hand to the body followed by a right hook to the head. Williams blocks each. Wiggins tries it again then delivers a few soft jabs to open him up a bit. Williams' ability had to block and parry has become a puzzle for Wiggins, one that he must solve with volume. One, two, three, four—BAM! Wiggins' last soft jab is returned by a hard right hand counter by Williams. His head snaps back. His eyes roll a bit, likely becoming used to the streaking lights that swirl around him when they do. Two more lefts and a right from Williams have Wiggins retreating now by instinct, but the next punch is the one that jolts his knees. Suddenly, Wiggins' back is to the corner. He's trapped. Williams throws punches as fast as he can. Wiggins bends low to grab him in an effort to buy some time, but he can't. No matter, the ploy worked in a way because the referee is coming over to separate them now. Wiggins will catch his breath and get right back at it. He will not give in.

"What?!" Wiggins screams to referee Robert Byrd, who is now waving his hands in front of the brave fighter telling him the fight is over. "WHAT?!"

"You're corner threw the towel in," Byrd explains, ignoring the impolite shove he just received from the disgusted combatant.

Wiggins doesn't like what just happened, but this is exactly the corner's job. Their decision is commendable. Wiggins is not Rocky. He is a real person. No one wants to see anyone permanently injured or needlessly pummeled. Wiggins' work today is now done, and it has been enough.

Beyond Defeat

So let's hear it for the losers now, Evander Holyfield, Floyd Patterson, Jeremiah Wiggins and others like them, the brave few who know not when to quit. They trudge towards danger, with nary a hesitation, marching to the beat of inevitable decline. They dare to face insurmountable odds with zeal and conviction. Valiant souls who look with noble eyes and pure hearts through what is in front of them into something beyond defeat, something less transient than despair, something more important than mere comfort. These men come to fight, and we are all better because of it.

In Celebration of Defeat

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 31 January 2013 11:16

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Nice copy! Nothing for me to add. Living is about defeat. Death defeats life in the end of all human. Aging overtakes being young in the end of all creations. So why not focus on "In Celebration of Defeat."

Witty piece! Holla!

teaser says:

losing yes is a part of life ...but that doesn't mean you have to accept it ...that defines a fighter ...and why sometimes they have to be saved from themselves ...God love them for there mettle

the Roast says:

Love that 10th round fom Bowe-Holyfield. Brings tears to my eyes thinking about it.

Radam G says:

The mettle is not accepting quitting. Fighters accept losing. The believe of the why is the problem. Holla!