Written by Michael Woods
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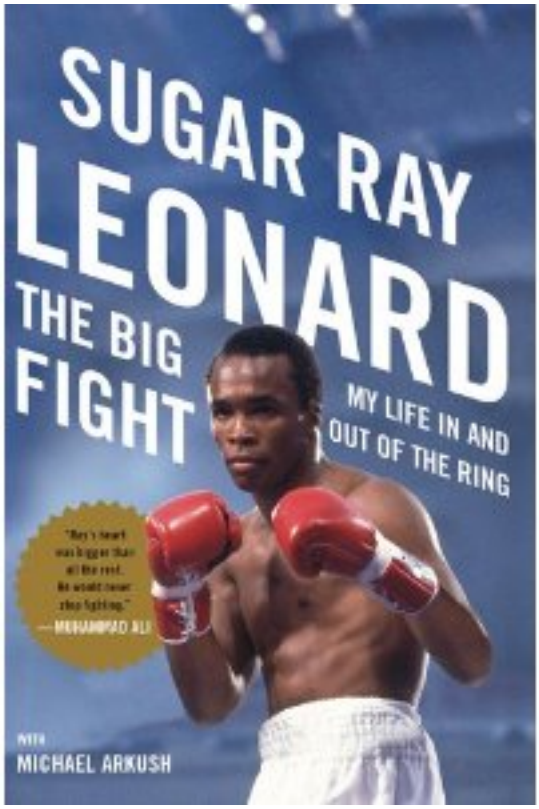

Hall of Famer Sugar Ray Leonard, who rose to prominence when he won a gold medal at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, says in his forthcoming autobiography "The Big Fight: My Life In and Out of the Ring" that he was sexually abused by an Olympic coach.

The 55-year-old Leonard, who retired in 1997 with a 36-3-1 record, told the NY Times that the coach, who he called "prominent" but did not name, abused him twice. First, the ex boxer wrote, the coach accompanied Leonard, then aged 15, to a tournament in Utica, NY. The coach had Leonard and another young boxer take a bath together, while he watched them. Leonard termed that situation "inappropriate." He told the Times that years later, the same man sat in a car with him and performed oral sodomy on the young fighter.

This disclosure is sure to set in motion a desire to learn the name of the alleged abuser. The head coach at the 1976 Games was Pat Nappi, who was also the head coach in 1980 and 1984. He died at age 75 in 1993. Tom "Sarge" Johnson was an assistant to Nappi at the 1976 games. He died in the 1980 plane crash which killed 14 US boxing team fighters and eight support personnel. The squad was in Poland for a set of matches and their plane crashed near Warsaw International Airport.

An August 9, 1976 Sports Illustrated story by Pat Putnam refers to Nappi and Johnson as the sole coaches for their squad. "They prayed together often, the fighters and their coaches—Pat Nappi, a quiet Italian-American from Syracuse, N.Y. and Tom Johnson, a gregarious black man from Indianapolis...," Putnam wrote in his take on the superlative '76 crew, which took home five

gold medals.

Common sense says that Nappi and Johnson could be implicated in the Leonard abuse situation. However, it must be noted that the situation occured a quarter century ago, and there were possibly other coaches who had access to Leonard at the time and were affiliated with the USA boxers. But the shocking revelations by the ex boxer cast a shadow on everyone who fits the description of the alleged abuser, so it was not without much deliberation that TSS dug a bit deeper into the scandalous tale.

Leonard's book, which comes out June 6, will also shed light on his substance abuse issues, which mushroomed when he stepped away from the ring, and found himself with an excess of free time, and a lack of direction.

Comment on this article

FighterforJC says:

Tmi!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Radam G says:

OMG! I would never believe that this story would come out during the lifetime of Sugar Ray Leonard. But those in da know knew -- always have known. The boxing community is a small-keeping-secrets group. We had/have a nickname for the coach that Ray is talking about and those similar to him. But I will not be one of the "loose lips that sink ships." [That coach, and other coaches who knew about him, use to voice that saying to U.S national-teamed boxers.]

Danggit! Ray has just revealed that even in a kickarse sport like da hurt bitnezz, you have sweet pants who rather get caught up in da $uck business. At 55, Ray is again SHOCKIN' da world. By George, I thought that Sugar Ray Leonard had too much man pride to ever reveal this. But now -- I suspect the name of that coach will come out -- a flood of allegations by other boxers is coming BIG TIME. WTF! Our dirty laundry is OUT! And it SUCKS! Holla!

Brad says:

I don't know. Ray said it happened "several years after he was 15," but before the Olymics, so that would make him 17,18, or 19 years old. It'd seem like if you're that old, and a damn boxer (someone use to fending off physical attacks) and a coach puts his hands on you, and you don't want him to, you tell him to get them off!! You don't let it get to the oral stage. it's a story that has been getting a lot publicity for a book that wouldn't normally get it. It just seems odd and unlikely that's how it went down.

Radam G says:

@Brad, boxing is a highly mental sports. You can be as tough as heck, but an old person in charge, who you trust, has BIG TIME psychological and emotional POWER over you. I guess you have never been in that position, so you would not know. Young boxers -- especially teenagers -- are very vulnerable to authority and superstar actors and entertainers.

And so that you will know, Sugar Ray Leonard first fought in the U.S. Olympic Trials at age 15 year old, as did Elmer James Kenty and Davey Armstrong in the same year of 1972. Great, great boxers -- back when it was easy -- always have put their ages up, so that they could get in the mix of things. Floyd Patterson won the Olympic Games when he was actually too young to compete in them. Holla!

Brad says:

I know....but he's a man at age 18 or 19. He said it happened 'several years' after he was 15. I'm not saying he made the story up, or that nothing happened, I'm simply wondering if he didn't maybe embellish this story a bit to get the publicity he's now getting for his books release new month. Plus Leonard has manipulated the press for his financial gain his entire life. He'll now got the medias attention and just watch him work them to help sell the book....but then again, I don't know. I'm a Duran fan and have never really believed too much of what Ray says.

FighterforJC says:

I don't know if this would be the wisest marketing strategy on Leonard's part, unless he's trying to appeal to the gay community. Because if everything he said was accurate, it would seem as though Leonard was a willing participant.

dino da vinci says:

@Brad. I agree with you. It reminds of the singer who was auditioning to be in one of those boy bands, and upon making the cut was told by the manager about one last hurdle: "Looks like I'm not going to be famous."

Radam G says:

@Brad, as I said my man, you are not in da know and you have probably not been around amateur boxing. Everybodee in it and dey mommas know about da coaches, officials, older fighters, sponsors and money-supporting fans on "da down low." C'mon man, boxing is metaphor for life. And everbody in boxing has come from life. There is sexual abuse in life. Now why would it not be in boxing, especially the amateurs? I don't want to burst your cultural bubbles, but the abusers -- back in the day -- didn't know that they were doing anything wrong. And many of the teens -- from the intercities -- consented. To them, "getting a bl*w job"-- a lot of time for paid -- was not thought of as a homosexual act or an attack by pedophile. To the kids, the one who take it in the hinny and mouth was the f*gg*t, not the one putting it there.

Welcome to pugilist REAL-LIFE dirty laundry and secrets 101. The Sugarman is not embellishing anything. Just stay tune for the flood of boxers who will come clean now. This is

unless they still have that great MAN PRIDE. I wouldn't be surprised if some politicians jump on da outraged bandwagon now. What happened when a boxer was a child stays in childhood is a mindset in amateur boxing culture. Eighteen is a MAN for voting, going up da river and going to war -- not manhood in most states of the United States or United Nations. I know this Universe. TSSU deals with da REAL, not some sanitized [word misspelled] nonsense. Holla!

Radam G says:

FJC, Sugar Ray Leonard is being truthful. He -- just as boxing great Emile Griffin -- has grown da cojones to violated a cultural code and speak out about a taboo thing in boxing and in black culture, like in most cultures. Don't forget about how ST6 found all of bin Laden's porno. And how many religious leaders, who are sweet in the pants, are eventually caught? This behavior is everywhere. Boxing is after all: "The theatre of the unexpected," especially to the casual fans. Holla!

the Roast says:

I have a confession to make. (deep breath) I used to touch myself as a young man. I fact, I sometimes still touch myself in an inappropriate manner. There, I've said it. I feel better.

Radam G says:

Boxing has long featured well-built, sexy, mostly-young individuals. Even da Cali Crusher was well-built and sexy in his amateur days. [And I ain't no punk. Dude just had it going on. So did I and still do.] So I cannot understand why so many fanfaronades are in deep self-denial about any type of sex and sexual abusing going on in da amateur game.

Oh My BIGGEST Godd*mns! Da game ain't "Mr. Robertson's Neighborhood," or "The Rumper Room Kids," or Big Bird's kiddy crew. Let me put it this way, and then I'm finished with it.

Many sexual predators use/used amateur boxing positions as coaching, financial supporting and officiating as covers and feeding sex mills to get their freak on with non-supecting, poor intercity and "country" kids. The predators could and did easily get out of trouble by telling the law and anybody who would asked that they "were just doing massage therapy on the lying, dumb-a$$ kids," who are "making up sh*t." YUP! NYET! These old men had/have great emotional and psychological POWER over these teenagers and young men, who were searching for a way out of poverty and oppression. Much luv and respect for one of my idols and icons for manning up and putting the light on a long problem of abuse of naived youths. Oh, Ray! Ya' da MAN! Holla!

Brad says:

Ray has always loved the spotlight. he knows if he doesn't have some "angle" no one cares about his book. Don't forget this is the guy that dressed up in a tux,sold tickets, in what everyone thought would be an announcement of Hagler-Leonard, even had Howard Cosell and Marvin Hagler there, just to say I quit. This is the guy who called a press conference long after

his boxing days were over to say he had a coke problem, which no one cared about. So I think this is our man Ray, just using the media again to help him get on talk shows and be in the spotlight once again, and sell some books. Ray is not, never has been and never will be anyones victim.

Radam G says:

Great jealousy of greatness does not change the situations or the truth. As Uncle Roger May has so elegantly said: "More people don't kno' sh*t 'bout boksin!'" Enough said! Holla!

Brad says:

He's is either speaking out on a taboo things...or selling a book. Sugar knows the media. He knows he sells almost nothing without so publicity- media buzz. So he does what he always does...he exploits the media to his advantage. In the old days, he called the media and Hagler together for a press conference, creating a buzz, then retires. As soon as the spotlight fades away Sugar ray comes back. How many times? Remember when he called a press conference to announce he did coke? It was years after his career was over. Who cares? He just loves the shine. Needs the attention. If he didn't have the "sexual abuse" angle, there is no way Regis and Kelly, all the network morning shows and the rest of the media would want him as a guest...but now. He's got what he's always craved...the spotlight.

Matthew says:

It's terrible that this occurred, if it is indeed true. Leonard shows courage in announcing this to the world, and one can certainly understand why he kept it inside for so long. I guess every sport has it's share of predators, and boxing is no different. This would explain a lot about the private side of a man who prided himself on not letting anyone really know him. For Leonard fans (as you all know, I am a big one), I suggest a great article written by William Nack entitled "The World According to Ray." It was written just before his third fight with Duran, and can be found online. It gives tremendous insight on what makes the man tick.

Matthew says:

@Brad. I wholeheartedly agree that in his prime, Leonard was a master at manipulating the media, and that he certainly craved the spotlight. His first retirement announcement was a cold and calculating slap in the face of Marvin Hagler, and I have always thought it was a bit unseemly. The cocaine revelation only came out because it was part of testimony in the divorce proceedings with his first wife. That happened shortly after the Terry Norris fight, not "years after his career was over." Ray has always been calculating, and even he would admit that. I can understand why people would be skeptical about this announcement coming out just before his autobiography is released. However, given the nature of this particular announcement, I think we would be wise to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Brad says:

Matthew, leave it to me to do the "un-wise" things and question the timing/validity of his claims. But, I am not alone.

[url]http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2011-05-19/sugar-ray-leonards-sex-abuse-story-why-is-it-coming-out-now/