

Rest in Peace, Tommy Morrison

Written by Michael Woods
Monday, 02 September 2013 10:15



Tommy Morrison, who for a brief span of time represented hope for an American boxing public who offered them a link to past glory days, and whose ring exploits were later overshadowed with his resistance to accepting a diagnosis of being HIV positive, has died.

The Oklahoma-bred hitter, whose [left hook](#) was the sort which could do damage to even the iron chinned, [was 44](#) . Cause of death has not been released.

His record as a professional will stand for perpetuity at 48-3-1, with 42 knockouts.

By 1991, his buzz was what it was partially because the press in the States had been

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preoccupied with finding that next "Great, White Hope," a Caucasian sensation whose skin tone would match that of a semi-substantial portion of the populace who sought a light-skinned heavyweight champ. Part of the early buzz spread because Morrison claimed to be the grand-nephew of film icon John Wayne, "the Duke." A 1990 role in Rocky V, playing the next big thing who Rock has to thrash some humility into, eventually, put him on the radar of non fight fans.

When Morrison [beat George Foreman](#) and nabbed the WBO title in 1993, he was a long step closer to being that guy. He wasn't now a trumped up sort, who got connections because of his complexion; no, coming back from the demolition KO

[Ray Mercer inflicted upon him](#)

in 1991 demanded Morrison be lauded for his heart and soul.

His luck, or his fate, took a turn when a rust-shedder against Michael Bentt in 1993 resulted in another KO loss, and the evaporation of an \$8 million payday against champion Lennox Lewis. He fought six rebuilding bouts, and then got the W against another bomber, Razor Ruddock, in 1995. That earned him the tardy date with Lewis, and Morrison lost to Lennox, via TKO in October of that year.

Fate landed a sharper blow in when Morrison tested HIV positive in 1996, as he prepped for a comeback bout, against Arthur Weathers. He was 27, and the world had been turned on its axis for him, as quickly and violently as his left hook disconnected foes from reality. Morrison initially accepted the HIV diagnosis, and admitted he was extremely promiscuous. "Sex became a part of my conditioning program," he'd tell people. NBAer Magic Johnson had somewhat prepared sports fans for this news when on Nov. 7, 1991, he told the public he was HIV positive, but Magic's situation didn't help bring much in the way of clarity to a young athlete who had to ponder the end of his career, and, perhaps, his life.

You had to feel for Morrison when he publicly pondered if he had five, maybe ten years left to live. He made it longer than that, but the road was paved with incidents galore for the man who was entering Toughman contests when he was 13 struggled to come to grips with the stunning diagnosis. By the fall of 1996, Morrison was saying he wanted to fight on, against the perception that HIV necessitated a ring exit. His quest was helped by the announcement by George Foreman that he'd happily share a ring, and blood and sweat, with Morrison.

By 1997, his acceptance of HIV had switched, to a stubborn denial. The medications used to

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treat HIV, he maintained, not the virus, kicks a breakdown in the immune system into motion. Marcus Rhode agreed to get in the ring against Morrison on Nov. 3, 1996, but the venue was in Japan, as the US wasn't open to allowing Morrison to play his trade here.

He boxed twice more, during a more serious comeback attempt, in 2007 and finally, in 2008, against Matt Weishaar in Mexico, a TKO3 victory.

Morrison was fighting the law at times following the diagnosis. In 2000, he sat in an Arkansas lockup, for a cocaine and firearm charge. The story how he contracted HIV had changed, as he now says he got it injecting steroids.

By 2006, he was telling the press that it's possible some nefarious boxing promoter had rigged the test to come up positive, to stop the Morrison train in its tracks. But hope came alive in 2007, when it looked like Top Rank would sign him, if he looked decent in his February bout in West Virginia against John Castle. His blood showed no trace of HIV, and thus he was able to step in the ring. He beat Castle and fought in Mexico, but age, and layoffs, had sapped him of too much vibrancy. He would not box again, though he was still talking comeback and working out in 2010 and 2011, even though so of his own family members, including dad Tim, said he was "deteriorating."

Some worried about his mental state when he asserted that he'd teleported himself to get out of a shady situation in a tavern in a 2011 interview.

By 2012, the rumor mill churned regular rumors that his health had taken a nasty turn, and he wasn't long for this earth.

Last week, [a story hit ESPN](#) which said Morrison's mom stated he has AIDS, and is "in the end stages," in a bed in Nebraska. His current wife, Trisha Morrison, told the writer he was sick, but not from AIDS. She wrote this on his Facebook page a bit after noon on Monday: "Tommy fought right to his last breath. I held his powerful left hook hand till the end- he was not alone. I never left his side. He so loved his fans and reading and listening to your emails and messages. In his last few minutes, I whispered into his ear how much his friends and family loved him. He deserves to be inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame- would you help me help him get there? Send your emails of support and love to tommythedukemorrison1

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[@yahoo.com](#)

so I can

share them with his sons that love him so much."

Morrison's legacy will be easiest to convey from the videos which show him hurling that thunderbolt of a left hook. Of course, his legacy is more varied and murky than that. Morrison used boxing to get distance from himself and a difficult home life, where his volatile dad could be abusive--dad put him in Toughman shows when he was in seventh grade--so it can be argued that Morrison is an example of boxing's ability to lift up, as it gave him purpose and direction. He also helped convince holdouts that HIV isn't a "gay" disease, that the virus can be spread by heterosexuals, so for that inadvertent public service, he can be commended.

The Morrison life for me brings to mind the quote by Plato: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle."

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DaveB says:

So sad to hear. Condolences to his family. He will be missed. He went through so much in his short life.

Carmine Cas says:

Damn, RIP Tommy Morrison

amayseng says:

it is really a terrible story of ups and downs. to be so young and diagnosed with a death sentence at the time.

wow.

it seems that the easy battles in his life were in the ring, even if losing or getting knocked out....

he always came back with heart and was no gun shy, never

sad.

rip

Radam G says:

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My deepest condolences. T-M was determined that AIDS would not take him out. The wear and tear of the "gay" disease myth contributed to his demise.

T-M! We'll holla at the crossroad. Until then, party up behind those Pearly Gates. I'll see ya, in da [metaphoric] morning." Holla!

Schteeeve says:

RIP Tommy.

brownsugar says:

RIP Soldier.

SouthPaul says:

Tommy slugged it out 15 rounds with the grim reaper but reports are he won making it to heaven. War Morrison!

Bernie Campbell says:

Hey whats with the mug shot? He didn't have blond hair all the time? Save that for Stevenson! Pure garbage! How this is treated!

SouthPaul says:

I'd give up 10 Bernie Campbell's just to get back a 1/3 of Tommy Morrison.

amayseng says:

i agree SouthPaul, he followed your classy post with something pretty obnoxious

Bernie Campbell says:

Whose payroll are you on? Im sure Morrison took care of his arrangements! I don't believe he expired because of AIDs? What is the origin? What Green Monkey did he allow to bite him? Wake up! And as far as 10 of me for 33% of Morrison! You ignore 5% of the population that are affected! Stick to the truth of the facts! I don't walk around saying Im God and don't do damn next to nothing about finding an antedote! And don't have the nuggets to do research and find the causes! Instead you infringe on Moia and try me to hop on your campaign because I may pass gas in public! Give me a break God! Did you want a response?

Radam G says:

The word is that he likely expired due to tuberculosis. C'mon, B-Camp! CHILLAX! Holla!

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the Roast says:

Rest in peace Tommy Morrison. Too early to go out at age 44. Everyone always says life is short and it really is. When I think of Tommy Morrison the first thing I think of is the Mercer fight. That has to be one of the most vicious KOs in boxing history. R.I.P. Tommy.

Bernie Campbell says:

This is one of the legacy's we leave! If you people want to be TRUE Americans youll solve it! We're still working on Kennedy! You gotta keep away from subjects you don't know about! Talking sh..! You people arnt really that educated! I don't understand Boytsov? If I were him, Id fight with a concussion (for honor!) For Mother Russia! I don't get easily mesmorized!

kaideb says:

This is not sad. You reap what you sow. He gave my best friend HIV and she died from AIDS on Sept 12-2006. RIP T.E.

kaideb says:

The truth eventually comes out!!

kaideb says:

You reap what you sow. The truth came out. RIP T.E.

kaideb says:

you reap what you sow. RIP T.E.

kaideb says:

you reap what you sow. RIP T.E.