

REMEMBERING RON MARSH

(Hall-of-Fame boxing promoter J Russell Peltz takes a look at another side of the career of light-heavyweight and heavyweight Ron Marsh, who passed away in September).

The recent passing of heavyweight Ron Marsh brought back a pleasant memory, one which always left a smile on my face (an occurrence, some would say, which comes as often as Haley's Comet). I'm not sure I ever saw Marsh fight, either in person or on television and I know I never met him, not even the night we sat within 24 feet of each other—I was on the other side of the ring from him--in 1978 in Memorial Auditorium in Kansas City.

Marsh, of St. Paul, MN, had been a light-heavyweight and heavyweight of modest success, mostly on the Midwest circuit where he boxed as a pro from 1965 to 1970, winning 32 out of 35 fights. He beat Karl Zurheide and Andy Kendall and lost to Buster Mathis and once was ranked in the Top 10 as a light-heavyweight at a time when rankings actually mattered. He was 5-foot-11 and never weighed more than 191 pounds. He would be a cruiserweight today.

After Marsh quit the ring, he worked as a fight judge in addition to his day job as a school teacher. This particular night, he was one of three judges—the others were John Romano and Bill Easton—who were scoring the 10-round middleweight contest between Bennie Briscoe, of Philadelphia, PA, and local matinee idol Tony Chiaverini, of Kansas City.

Briscoe, at 35, was in the twilight of his remarkable career which had begun in 1962. He was coming off a pair of tough losses to Rodrigo Valdes by 15-round decision in Italy for the world middleweight title, and to future champ Vito Antuofermo by 10-round decision in Madison Square Garden. Still, he was Bennie Briscoe and his name on the marquee against Chiaverini helped draw more than 10,000 that night, shattering the state indoor record set in 1937 in the same building by Joe Louis and Natie Brown.

Hall-of-Famer Henry Armstrong, who once held undisputed world titles in three different weight classes at the same time, was in attendance.

The fight was strictly a one-way affair. Briscoe hit Chiaverini with nearly everything he threw. Had *punch stats* been in vogue, his connect rate would have set records. When Chiaverini did manage to land a shot, it was as effective as “throwing spitballs at a battleship” (to steal a line from Howard Cosell).

Chiaverini was battered, beaten and bloody and finally, in the middle of the eighth round, he motioned to the referee that he had had enough, giving Briscoe a knockout victory. The next day, when I read the local newspapers, I saw the officials’ scorecards. Judges Romano and Easton each had Briscoe leading by a single point at 68-67, which equated to two rounds for Briscoe, one for Chiaverini, and four rounds even. It was obvious those two jokers were doing everything possible to steal the victory from Briscoe. Marsh, on the other hand, was the only official actually watching. He had it 70-60 for Briscoe, or seven rounds to none. Perhaps this ex-fighter was tired of seeing bogus decisions handed down in the sport he loved.

It would have been nice had Marsh been ringside Saturday night in Atlantic City to score the Peter Quillin-Gabriel Rosado fight, but don’t get me started on that one.

The large crowd at the Briscoe-Chiaverini fight was mostly all-white and there had been more than a few racist comments during the evening, regardless of whether an out-of-town opponent had been black or Hispanic. If there were a dozen black men in the building, four of them were in Briscoe’s corner along with Armstrong and the non-voting referee, Elorda Morrison.

I never tried to contact Ron Marsh afterward to thank him for doing his job, but I certainly appreciated his approach to his work. Ex-fighters know all too well what can happen when decisions are left in the hands of either crooked or incompetent officials. Haven’t we seen too many of them in recent years?

So it really doesn’t matter much to me what kind of fighter Ron Marsh was. It was more important for me to realize what kind of man he was.

RIP, Ron Marsh

Written by The Sweet Science
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