

# Can Boxing Be Saved?

## Where Have You Gone, Muhammad Ali, George Foreman And Sugar Ray Leonard?

by Robert Eller

Remember when Muhammad Ali was beating the likes of George Foreman, Joe Frazier and everybody else in the boxing world after coming out of his forced retirement?

Or when Sugar Ray Leonard topped Wilfredo Benitez?

Or Leonard's classic bouts with Roberto Duran?

Ah, those were the good ol' days when the fans, sportswriters and broadcasters, not to mention fighters and promoters who were making millions, adored the sport of gladiators.

Well, let's see what happened to the boxing, its fans and its power brokers now that Ali has failed in his last comeback against Larry Holmes, Sugar Ray Leonard has decided to hang his gloves up and Roberto Duran is no longer saying "no mas" with his mouth but with his performances in the ring.

The biggest fight of this year, as far as this writer is concerned, was the match between Benitez and Thomas Hearns, both of whom had only lost one bout each in their careers, both to the great Leonard. It was the kind of match-up that made promoter Don King's hair curl. (You can be sure, however, that he didn't let anyone see it that way.) It was to be a classic battle between two of the best fighters in the world and with Leonard gone and Larry Holmes never to get the credit he de-

serves, possibly a battle for "King of the Ring."

The winner would make millions and so would the loser, and King would again be smiling and sticking his diamond covered fingers in front of the cameras.

So what happened? Just a few short days before the fight, the boxers were notified that they would have to take a small cut in their expected purses. The tickets just weren't selling.

And why weren't tickets to this historic battle being gobbled up like hotcakes at a Salvation Army breakfast? There was the Duk Koo Kim tragedy for one thing. Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini's punches directly or indirectly leading to the Korean fighter's death certainly didn't help the sport, but the news that ticket sales were not going well was out long before that unfortunate bout.

Could it have been the terrible mismatch that occurred on national TV when Larry Holmes carried "Tex" Cobb for 15 rounds? That may have had something to do with it, too. But what are the underlying facts that have boxing on its sick-, if not death-, bed?

Why are the same people—Howard Cosell, for example—who were so high on boxing a few years ago now turning on the sport? Cosell recently announced that he would no longer do commentary on fights (I'm not complaining—are you?).

Maybe it's the bandwagon effect.

Boxing has gotten some really black eyes over the past few years. Ali's admission that he used a drug to get his weight down, the death of a number of lesser-known fighters than Kim in less-publicized fights, the departure of Ali and Leonard from the ring, the question of the rankings the two governing bodies that have different title-holders (World Boxing Association and World Boxing Council) are among boxing's recent setbacks.

Call me a racist if you want, but the feeling here is that one of the main reasons boxing has lost some of its support is the lack of outstanding white fighters. (That's right, I said it.) Had Gerry Cooney won the heavyweight title from Larry Holmes, boxing would have been in much better shape. If there were another legitimate "Great White Hope" on the horizon, that would certainly help, too, or even if Don King were not the biggest and most successful promoter and Bob Arum, a white man, instead were the man who could pull the strings, things might be different.

The truth of the matter is that boxing, like pro basketball, another sport that is suffering from the racism of fans, has become too dominated by blacks.

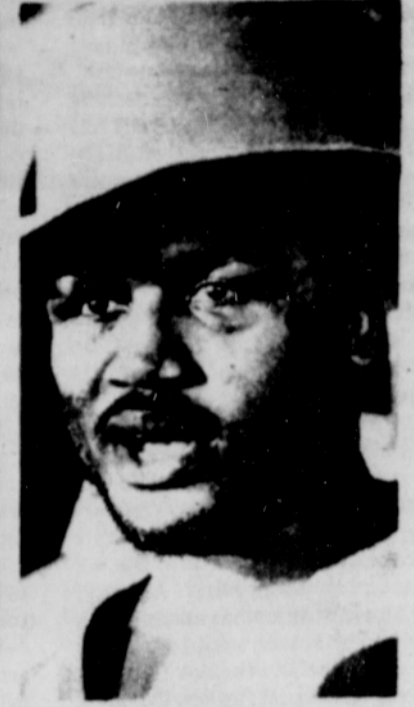
That, along with the attitude of fans who are subject to throw bottles, cans or other objects and possibly even riot at almost any time, is the biggest problem with the sport,



Muhammad Ali



Sugar Ray Leonard



Joe Frazier

not the possibility of death in the ring.

Muhammad Ali once defended boxing's right to exist by drawing an analogy with auto racing. Just how many drivers have been killed in auto races over the past year? Has anyone called for a ban on that sport? Motorsports is by far more dangerous than boxing and although I am one who loves auto rac-

ing with a passion, just how many top auto racers are black?

As for the cries of fixed fights, why should the sport be banned because some say that fights are fixed? Nobody has called for the abolition of professional wrestling, and there, the men in the ring go strictly by a script, knowing when to punch, when to fall and when to get pinned. Or what about college basketball?

Wasn't it proven that players on a major college team were shaving points just a year or two ago? Is anyone calling for a ban on college basketball?

So what will it take to stem the tide and keep professional boxing alive? This writer isn't sure, but a couple of white champs and a big-time white promoter would sure help.



**NATIONAL AMATEUR BOXING CHAMPS**—The U.S.A. Amateur Boxing Federation national championship tournament was held recently in Indianapolis, Ind. It produced some new faces to the national amateur boxing title scene, and, of course, some old ones. The new champions with weight class listed in parenthesis are from left kneeling: Bryan Jones (106), Philadelphia, Pa.; Todd Hickman (112), Akron, Ohio; Meldrick Taylor (119), Philadelphia, Pa.; Bernard

Gray (125), Boynton Beach, Fla.; Clifford Gray (132), Boynton Beach, Fla.; and Henry Hughes (139), Cleveland, Ohio. From left in top row are Ronnie Essett (147), Indianapolis, Ind.; Dennis Milton (156), Bronx, N.Y.; Michael Grogan (165), Atlanta, Ga.; Sherman Griffin (178), Minneapolis, Minn.; Ricky Womack (Heavyweight), Detroit, Mich.; and Warren Thompson (Super Heavyweight), Baltimore, Md. Budweiser is the sponsor of local, regional and national amateur boxing championships which will lead to the United States Olympic Boxing team to compete in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

### OSU gymnasts face first trial

With an optimistic eye on the season ahead, Oregon State's gymnastics team will open the 1983 campaign this weekend in Seattle in the Washington Invitational Meet on Saturday, Jan. 8.

The meet will pit the Beavers against virtually all of the top gymnastics teams in the Northwest and will be a good early-season test for OSU, the defending regional cham-

pion ranked fifth nationally this season in pre-season polls. Ron Ludwig's team, which finished fourth in the national tournament a year ago, will be favored in the eight-team meet this Saturday but the coach figures the improving quality of gymnastics in the Northwest will offer the Beavers enough challenge.

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There are an estimated 61 varieties of chili peppers in Mexico alone.

Lena Horne was the first black woman to sign a term-contract in films.

The first regular air mail service for civilian mail in the United States started in 1918.

Pluto is not longer the most distant planet from the sun. In 1978, it and Neptune exchanged places. They change again in March, 1999.

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