

## Sugar Ray Leonard: 'The Big Fight'

By Kam Williams  
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One of the most prodigious pugilists of all time, Sugar Ray Leonard was born in Rocky Mount, N.C. on May 17, 1956, to Cicero and Getha Leonard. The fifth of seven kids, his family moved to Washington, DC in 1959 before settling down seven years later in Palmer Park, Md., where his father was employed as a supermarket night manager and his mother as a nurse.

Though shy as a young child, Ray followed his brother Roger's footsteps into boxing, ultimately eclipsing his elder sibling in terms of potential and finding fame by capturing the gold medal at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. He went on to become the first fighter to earn over \$100 million over the course of an enviable career, winning world championship titles in five different weight classes while

squaring-off in classic showdowns with such formidable opponents as Roberto "No Mas" Duran, Tommy "The Hitman" Hearns, Marvelous Marvin Hagler and Wilfred Benitez.

Ray retired from the ring in 1997 with a record 36-3-1, with 25 of those wins coming by knockout. Today, he lives in California with his wife, Bernadette, and their children, Camille and Daniel. Here, he discusses his moving memoir, 'The Big Fight: My Life In and Out of the Ring.'

**Kam Williams:** Hi Sugar Ray, I'm honored to have this opportunity to speak with you. How're you doing, champ?

**Sugar Ray Leonard:** I'm alright, Kam, how're you?

**KW:** Great! I understand our mutual friend, filmmaker Janks Morton, Jr., the son of your first boxing coach, gave you a call on my behalf.

**SRL:** Yeah, man, this kid was so special, although he's not a kid anymore, obviously, but he was there from day one of my rise through boxing. You know how the years go by and then, when you stop to reflect, you realize that someone was a part of your whole evolution as an individual? That's what I share with Junior.

**KW:** Yeah, he told me you guys go way back. I have a lot of questions from fans who sent in questions for you. Editor/legist Patricia Turnier says: I am from Montreal where you won your gold medal at the '76 Olympics. What is your best memory of the city?

**SRL:** My very best memory of Montreal was the moment inside the Olympic arena when I was waiting under the stadium and those majestic gates opened up. It was a whole other world. Kam, I was just a youngster from the ghetto. I suddenly felt like a star. It was emotionally overwhelming. It was something I'd wanted, but it was also something I didn't understand. It was a whole different world, and Montreal was an absolutely beautiful setting unlike anywhere I'd ever been before. So, Montreal in '76 was an encompassing experience I will cherish for the rest of my life.

**KW:** Patricia also says: It is widely known that it is very difficult for men to talk about sexual abuse. What made you decide to go public with your story, and was it a cathartic and healing experience to write about it?

**SRL:** It was cathartic, Patricia. I only wish that I had had the courage and the knowledge to have gotten that out of my system, out of my mind or my heart years earlier. But there is no book, there is no manual to tell you how to deal with sexual abuse. I saw Todd Bridges talk about being abused on Oprah. Something that he said, or an expression that he made that gave me that little boost I needed to be open about it and to talk about it as transparently as I did. When I told my wife, she couldn't believe it. She was petrified, because it's such a no-no, taboo, a hands-off subject.



But I'd have to say hearing Todd Bridges on Oprah was my watershed moment.

**KW:** Kate Newell says: I saw you on Stephen Colbert and loved it. She was wondering why a movie hasn't been made about your life?

**SRL:** Being on Colbert was a real treat for me, too. I didn't quite know what to expect, but it turned out to be pretty cool. In terms of a movie, we're talking about it. It's on the table but, as you know, Kam, that type of thing doesn't just happen overnight, unfortunately. But I do look forward to seeing the story of my life onscreen someday.

**KW:** You should talk to Tyler Perry.

**SRL:** I would love that.


**KW:** Or better yet, Janks, if you could get him to switch over to drama from directing documentaries.

**SRL:** Janks could do it justice, and I'm not being facetious. You know why? Because he knows the story.

He's been in the story. And it's real. It's raw. Maybe a little too raw for people at times. But this generation raised on reality-TV might be ready for it.

**KW:** I agree. Boxing fan Mike Ehrenberg asks: Was Wilfred Benitez the best pure boxer you ever faced?

**SRL:** Yes, without question. He was a mirror image of what I considered myself as a boxer. That was one of my toughest fights, by far. It's sad that he's not mentioned in the same breath as Hearns, Hagler and Duran. It always bothered me that he wasn't considered in our league, the reason being that he never beat any of us. But he should be right up there.

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