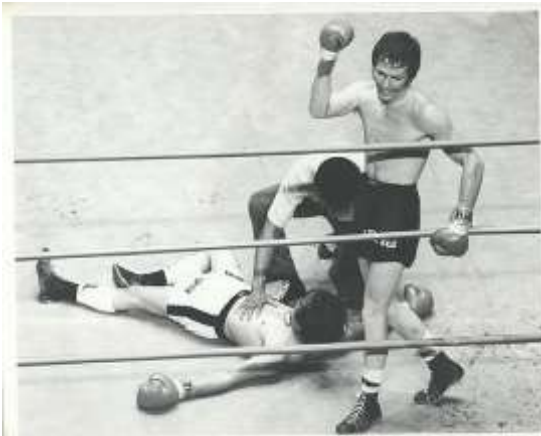


## DANNY "LITTLE RED" LOPEZ; A 1970's ICON.



One of the most popular fighters of the talent filled 1970's was hard hitting Danny "Little Red" Lopez. He was the younger brother of top welterweight contender Ernie "Red" Lopez. When Danny turned professional in 1971 he quickly became a West Coast favorite. He was considered almost a sure thing to be a champion one day. Lopez would find out that there were some bumps in road on the highway to a title. Danny won his first ten bouts and then faced his first major test. He was matched with (13-0) Tury "The Fury" Pineda. The Los Angeles Olympic Auditorium was in a frenzy as Danny dispatched Pineda in round four. Pineda would prove to be no slouch as would later fight for the WBC lightweight title on two occasions.

Lopez continued to reel off victories but it was becoming clear that he was on a collision course with another hot prospect. His name was Bobby "Schoolboy" Chacon. In 1974 Lopez entered the Los Angeles Sports Arena ring with a sterling 23-0 record. Chacon was 23-1 with his only loss coming against the great Ruben Olivares. On this night Chacon was on his game as he took Danny to school. The bout was mercifully stopped in the ninth round. Although the loss to Chacon diminished Danny's star, losing to Chacon was not the end of the world. Nevertheless over the next few months the future would begin to look very bleak for Lopez. Later in 1974 Danny was stopped in the eighth round by Japan's Shig Fukuyama. If that wasn't enough to stun the experts a 1975 loss to rugged and clever Octavio "Famoso" Gomez sent the Lopez stock tumbling.



*Lopez kayoes Raul Cruz in the sixth round on July 26, 1975 to run his record to 26-3-0.*

Just when it looked like Danny was an over hyped media creation, he would mount a great comeback. Lopez was on a mission as he put together a series of knockouts that would establish him as the #1 contender for the featherweight title. He would halt former bantamweight champion Jesus "Chucho" Castillo in two rounds. Then he took out one time title challenger Raul Cruz in six. Lopez would then score his biggest victory to date stopping former bantamweight and featherweight champion Ruben Olivares in seven. It was a very impressive performance by Lopez as he was now inching closer to a shot at the championship. Danny then took on future lightweight champion Sean O'Grady. Lopez overwhelmed the young O'Grady posting a fourth round stoppage. Then it was sweet revenge for Danny as he pummeled Octavio Gomez in three rounds reversing his earlier loss. Lopez would

then put the icing on the cake of his storybook comeback. He would batter the tough and game Art Hafey in seven rounds. Now it was time for Danny to challenge for the title.

On November 6, 1976 in Accra, Ghana Lopez would meet WBC featherweight champion David Kotey. This fine champion had won the title from Ruben Olivares and sported a 33-2-2 record. Kotey had his hometown crowd behind him but neither Kotey or the crowd could derail Lopez. Danny gave Kotey quite a drubbing and only Kotey's tremendous courage allowed him to hear the final bell. Danny Lopez was now the featherweight champion of the world.

The popularity of Lopez was now soaring and he was on his way to becoming a TV fan favorite. His stotic approach to the task at hand coupled with the power of his right hand was enticing to the masses. After two 1977 non title wins, Danny took down Jose Torres in seven rounds for his first defense. In 1978 Lopez gave Kotey a shot at regaining his crown. This bout took place in Las Vegas and Danny overpowered the former titleholder for a sixth round knockout. Next was a six round beat down of Jose Francisco DePaula. In his fourth defense Lopez took on Juan Domingo Malvarez at the Superdome in New Orleans. This was on the undercard of Muhammad Ali versus

Leon Spinks. Danny would halt Malvarez in the fourth. Then it was off to Italy as Lopez won on a disqualification against Fel Clemente. Next in what was to be a stern test for Lopez turned out to be a blowout as he ended the title hopes of Spain's Roberto Castanon in round two.

The next defense for Lopez would prove to be his shining moment. Danny took on the slick and gutsy Mike Ayala and they would fight in Ayala's hometown of San Antonio, Texas. This was a WAR with several shifts in momentum. It was the kind of bout that had you on the edge of your seat throughout the contest. There was hardly a break in the action. Ayala was busier but Lopez was by far the harder puncher. It became a war of attrition. Who would be the last man standing? Finally after fourteen torrid rounds, Danny broke through in the fifteenth to end Ayala's game stand. This would be the Ring Magazine 1979 Fight of the Year.

Lopez would make his eighth defense against Jose Caba winning in the third round. Danny's next defense would be in 1980 against unheralded Mexican Salvador Sanchez. Although Sanchez had a glossy 33-1-1 record he was little known outside of his native Mexico. On February 2nd the two would meet in Phoenix, Arizona. On this day a legend would emerge. Sanchez fought a picture perfect fight. While Lopez seemed stale and slow, Sanchez looked fast and sharp. He beat Lopez to the punch throughout the fight but there was no quit in Lopez. The proud champion was finally rescued in the thirteenth round. Sanchez would next turn back the challenge of (47-1) Ruben Castillo by decision. The stage was now set for Sanchez - Lopez II. The rematch took place on June 21st in Las Vegas. It was a carbon copy of their first match. Lopez had no answer for the style of Sanchez. This time Lopez would be punished into the fourteenth round before his night ended.

Lopez would retire after the losses to Sanchez. We will never know how great Sanchez would have become as he lost his life at the age of 22 in a tragic 1982 auto accident. Danny would make an ill fated comeback in 1992 and was defeated in two rounds by Jorge Rodriguez. This should not reflect on the fine career of Lopez. In all Lopez had 48 bouts and finished with a 42-6 record. He was a knockout winner 39 times. He always stalked his opponents looking to land his power laden right hand. If Danny did hit the canvas he would just get up and dust himself off. Then it was back to stalking his foe. Lopez was pound for pound one of the hardest punchers of that talent rich era. Lopez was a promoter's dream as he put "asses in the seats". Lopez was finally inducted into the International Boxing Hall Of Fame in 2010. It was long overdue but now Danny is right where he belongs.

***Jim Amato***