

ONE OF THE BEST WELTERWEIGHTS OF THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES

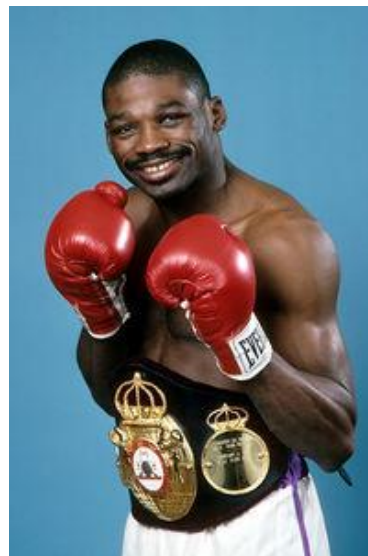
By Roger Zotti

If you had to define professional boxing in the 1980s, with just ten fighters, Marlon Starling's name was a must. . . . There are some who don't remember that both professional and amateur boxing was outlawed in 1965 by act of Connecticut State General Assembly. The unconscionable decree immediately shelved the future of half a generation of potential ring stars from the state of Connecticut. Marlon Starling was the fighter who brought it back.

Mark Allen Baker, author and boxing historian

Hartford-born Marlon Starling won twenty-five consecutive fights before suffering a split decision loss to Donald Curry in 1984. At stake were the World Boxing Association World Welterweight title and the International Boxing Federation Welterweight title.

Prior to the loss to Curry, in 1983 Starling defeated Kevin Howard, at the Hartford Civic Center, to win the NABF and USBA welterweight titles. That same year he decisioned Tommy Ayers, in defense of those titles, this time at the Showboat Hotel & Casino, Sports Pavilion, in Las Vegas.



In 1985 he decisioned Floyd Mayweather, Sr, in Atlantic City, to win the United States Boxing Association Welterweight championship.

Two years later Starling, nicknamed “Magic Man,” faced undefeated World Boxing Association welterweight champion Mark Breland, at the Township Auditorium in South Carolina, and worked his magic that night, scoring a sensational come-from-behind TKO in the eleventh round.

A huge favorite, the lanky Breland, a talented fighter known for his punching power, boxing acumen, and stinging left jab, was ahead on the officials' scorecards

(99-91, 99-89, and 97-92) going into round eleven. But it had become apparent the superior conditioned, determined Starling was getting stronger as the fight progressed, while Breland appeared to be tiring. With two minutes remaining in the eleventh, “Magic Man” hurt Breland with a barrage of punches and then knocked him down with a devastating left hook to the head. Though Breland managed to beat the count, he was in no condition to continue and referee Tony Perez stopped the fight.



Hartford’s Marlon Starling was the new WBA welterweight champion!

Mark Allen Baker, the author of seven books about boxing, writes that “as boxing fans know, Breland had an incredible amateur career,” adding that “For Marlon Starling to defeat Breland, in [Breland’s] first WBA Welterweight Championship defense, was really an extraordinary accomplishment.” (Breland’s amateur record was 110-1, with 73 knockouts.)

In Starling’s first title defense, he won a unanimous decision over Fujio Ozaki, at the Convention Center in Atlantic City, in 1988.

The rematch with Breland took place in Las Vegas also in 1988, and ended in a draw, which meant Starling had retained his WBA championship. Not everyone agreed with the decision, however: HBO judge and analyst Harold Lederman said that “I saw it 8-4, in favor of Moochie Starling. . . . The fight was marred by a lot of holding and grabbing, pushing and shoving. But Moochie landed the harder, cleaner, and more effective punches and was in control . . . I think Moochie retained the title tonight, and I think he did a darn good job.”

Three months after the second Breland fight, Starling defended his WBA title against undefeated Tomas Molinares in Atlantic City’s Conventional Hall. The fight had a chaotic ending: Though an overhand right by Molinares knocked Starling out, it was clearly delivered two seconds after the bell

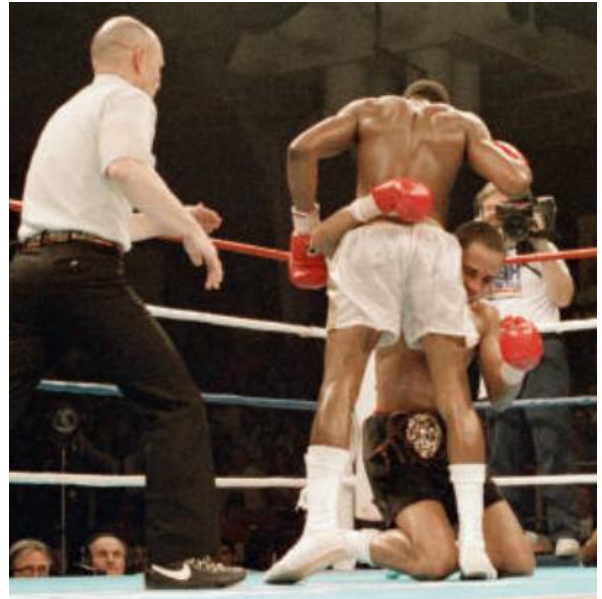


rang ending round six.

“. . . one of the luckiest punches of all time,” said HBO blow-by-blow commentator Jim Lampley, “and in my view clearly after the bell.” According to boxrec.com the fight was later declared no contest.

In 1989, Starling became the World Boxing Council world Welterweight champion by stopping England’s Lloyd Honeyghan in Las Vegas. That same year, at Hartford’s Civic Center, he defended his WBC title against Young Kil Jung, winning a unanimous decision.

In 1990, in Las Vegas, undefeated Michael Nunn decisioned Starling in the latter’s bid for the International Boxing Federation World Middleweight title. That same year Starling fought Maurice Blocker, in Reno, Nevada, and lost his WBC welterweight title by decision.



Starling Stops Honeyghan to win WBC World Welterweight Title

One of the best defensive and most savvy fighters of his time, Starling held, as we know, both the WBA and WBC world welterweight titles. He began boxing professionally in 1979 and retired in 1990 with an impressive 45-6-1 (1 NC) record.

Could he punch? Yes! Twenty-seven of his wins were by KO. Could he take a punch? Yes! During his long career he was never legitimately stopped.

In 2005 Starling was inducted into the Connecticut Boxing Hall of Fame.

A regular contributor to the *IBRO Journal*, Roger Zotti has written two books about boxing, *Friday Night World* and *The Proper Pugilist*. He can be reached at rogerzotti@aol.com.