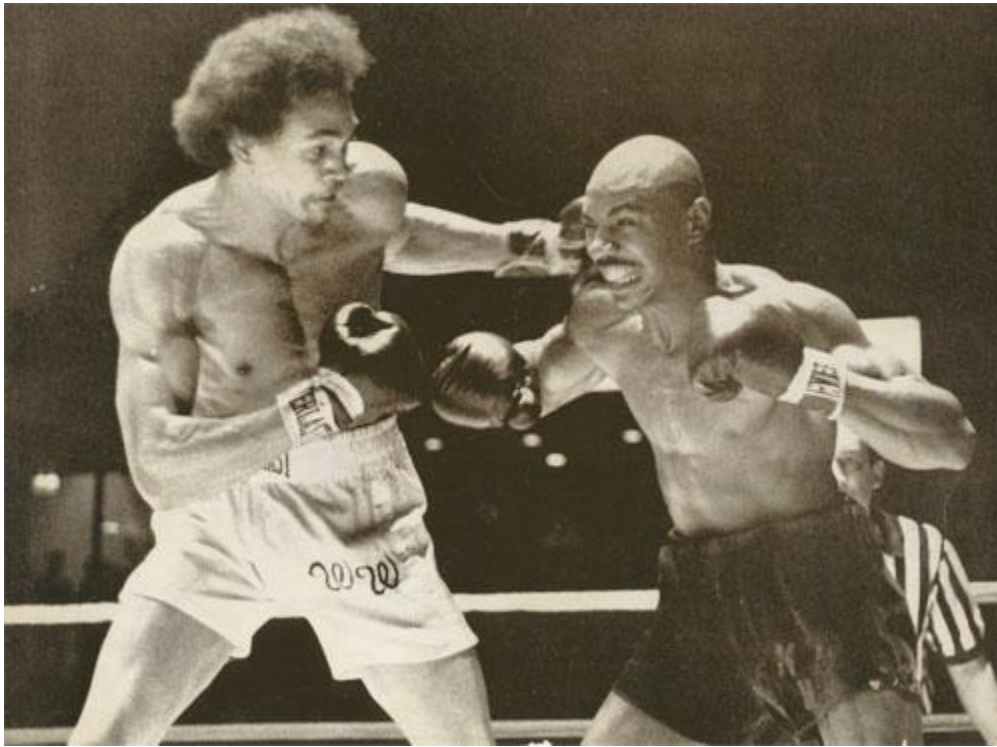


WILLIE MONROE PASSES

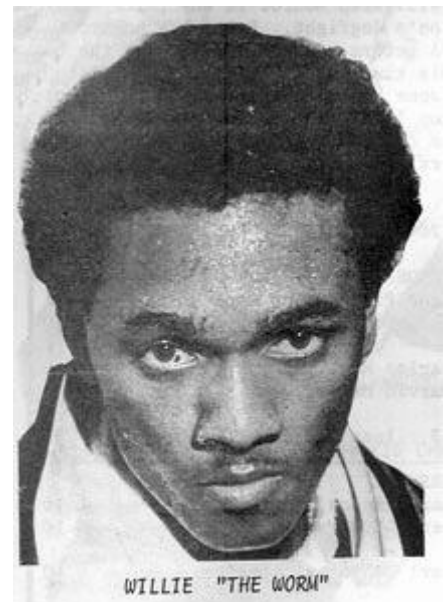
Story by John DiSanto (PhillyBoxing.Com)



Early in his career, middleweight legend Marvelous Marvin Hagler came to Philly intending to decimate the city's solid crop of 160-pounders. On his first visit, Hagler dropped a narrow decision to Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts". Many called it a bad decision - especially Marvelous Marv.

Two months later, Marvelous Marvin returned to town with his considerable boxing talents and a big chip on his shoulder, looking to take his frustration out on his next foe, Willie "The Worm" Monroe. However, on a snowy March night that was treacherous enough to keep the video crew from making it to the Spectrum (thus no footage of the fight exists), Marvin Hagler received a boxing lesson from Willie the Worm, and dropped a ten-round unanimous decision. It was his second career loss, and to this day it is the only fight that Hagler is willing to admit he lost.

On this past Saturday morning, June 22, 2019, nearly 43 years after the most important night of his boxing career, Willie Monroe passed away. He was 73 years old and suffering from Alzheimer's Disease.



Monroe began his boxing career on November 11, 1969 with a first round knockout of Vince Neratka at the Blue Horizon. Monroe was 23 years old, and his debut win was the first of thirteen straight knockouts and a nineteen-bout overall winning streak. The run made Willie one of Philly's most promising middleweights. During this opening chapter, Monroe beat solid pros like Alvin Phillips and Willie Warren.

In 1974, a critical phase of his young career began when Monroe took on some of the best local talent in a series of bouts intended to determine the best middleweight in Philly.

Monroe won a ten round decision over the dangerous Eugene "Cyclone" Hart in February. Hart had knocked out 23 opponents up to that point and was feared by all. However, Monroe used his fine jab and excellent boxing skills to avoid Cyclone's murderous punches en route to a unanimous decision win.

Two months later, on the same night that Hank Aaron surpassed Babe Ruth's all-time homerun record, Monroe stopped Stanley "Kitten" Hayward in seven rounds. Hayward was a step past his prime, but was still a dangerous and viable fighter. Monroe used his long, effective jab to cut the Kitten over both eyes, which forced an end to the fight. Hayward was impressed. "He'll never get hurt as long as he stays behind that long left hand," Stanley said after the bout.

Next for Monroe was the tough and seasoned Billy "Dynamite" Douglas, an Ohio slugger - and the father of future heavyweight champion Buster Douglas. Dynamite was no stranger to Philly fans after seven previous appearances here. Monroe had to climb off the floor in round eight, but ultimately scored a unanimous decision win.



That November, Monroe dropped a ten round decision to Boogaloo Watts in the final of the Philly middleweight tournament. It was a setback, but Monroe marched forward winning another five straight - including his masterpiece against Hagler.

After Hagler, Monroe, suddenly a budding contender, looked great stopping Felton Marshall (TKO7), but then came up short against bonafide "Philly Killer" David Love of California in August of 1976.

The final chapter of Monroe's career was a 6-6 stretch that eliminated his chances for a title shot thanks to two return losses to Hagler and consecutive decision defeats to young lions Curtis Parker and Dwight Davidson in 1979.

Monroe's overall pro record ended in 1981 at 39-10-1, with 26 KOs. He entered the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990.



Monroe was born on June 5, 1946 in Rochester, NY, but lived and fought out of Philadelphia for his entire career. He was trained by Yank Durham and then Eddie Futch, after Yank's death. This connection with the men who guided Joe Frazier's career, landed Monroe on some of Smokin' Joe's biggest fight cards.

He was a father and grandfather, and was married to his wife Barbara for more than 50 years. He lived quietly in South Jersey for the past several years, and made very few public appearances. Perhaps the last boxing fans saw him was at the unveiling of the Joe Frazier statue in 2015. Willie died at home surrounded by his family on Saturday morning, June 22nd.

The loss of Monroe diminishes our precious and dwindling supply of ring greats from Philly's Golden Era of boxing. With his passing, Willie joins George Benton, Bennie Briscoe, Joe Frazier, Matthew Saad Muhammad, and others, who all died in the past several years. Now only a few of the true greats remain, making them all the more precious.

Philly Boxing History, June 22, 2019